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THE STEEL MASK, - or, MYSTERY OF THE FLYING CLOUD.

By Professor J. H. Ingraham.



"Suddenly two monstrous white bears attacked us."

THE STEEL MASK;

—OR—

MYSTERY OF THE FLYING CLOUD.

A Romance of Sea and Shore.

BY PROFESSOR J. H. INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOOT-TRAVELLER AND HIS DOG.

It was at the close of one of those gorgeous days peculiar to the autumnal Indian summer, that a young man, with a small travelling bag in one hand, a stout staff grasped in the other, and followed by a small black intelligent looking terrier, was traversing a wildly romantic foot-path on the banks of the Hudson. The road along which he was walking, was shaded by overhanging forest trees, but at intervals he got glimpses of the river flowing past at the foot of the cliff, with a noble view of the columnar Palisades on the opposite shore. The broad stream flowed majestically onward to mingle with the blue sea six leagues southward, its bosom reflecting the golden, orange, and purple hues of the enamelled skies, and lively with craft of every description.

The foot-traveller on reaching a more elevated point in his path where the trees were less dense and from which the view was more open and extensive to the far-reaching gaze of the eye, he turned aside to a projecting spur of the eminence and stood leaning upon his stick contemplating, with the air of one who could feel and enjoy the beauties of natural scenery, the wide prospect above, below him, and before him. On his right, in the direction from which he had come, a mile distant, slept at the water side a picturesque little hamlet, composed of a cluster of half a score of houses, with an Inn, a small pier built a little ways out into the river. At this pier he had landed an hour before from an Albany sloop, which was now nearly opposite to where he stood, slowly continuing its way towards the metropolis. His eyes lingered upon the little vessel's deck, as he saw the crew moving about upon it, and he watched its progress as it receded from his view, with the looks of one taking leave of a friend.

On his left, just visible through a vista in the trees half a mile distant, was an imposing looking mansion of gothic architecture, its numerous turrets here and there peering with fine effect above the foliage of the noble oaks which surrounded it. After he had for some moments enjoyed in silence the beauty of the river which looked like liquid opal, the towering wall of pillared rock opposite to him, the swelling green hills beyond, and the glorious skies canopied all like some vast painted dome, he let his eyes rest upon the roof of the villa with an expression of peculiar interest.

"Well, Spiegle," he said, addressing the little Scotch terrier, "our journey is nearly at an end with the day. There lies its termination."

He had proceeded about a quarter of a mile further along the pleasant bridle-path, which he had turned into soon after quitting the village, when he came upon a large gateway. It was constructed of two massive stone pillars, joined by an arch beneath which a carriage could easily drive. The gate itself was of iron; on either side extended a wall of masonry enclosing an extensive park. The young man opened a side-gate, and followed by his little dog, which trotted close at his heels, entered an avenue as hard and smooth as a granite terrace. It wound among the trees for some distance, and following it he at length came in full view of one of the finest mansions he had ever seen. It was a very elegant structure of the purest Gothic, placed in the midst of a lawn which was as soft as a velvet carpet. The lawn sloped gradually to the Hudson of which, and its

shores through an opening in the trees of the park, it commanded an extensive view.

The young man paused a moment to survey the beauty of the place upon which he had so suddenly come, and then with an embarrassed air and a hesitating step he moved at a slower pace toward the stately front. He had to pass around an oval plat of the deepest verdure encircling a marble fountain, which catching the dyes of the western skies, seemed to be showering gold into the broad Parian basin beneath. Gold and silver fishes playing about in it turned their glittering scales to the light, and singing birds in the branches of an acacia above it increased the enchantment of the lovely scenes which met his eyes.

Upon walking round the oval he came in full sight of the portico, which consisted of a trellised gallery, half hidden by wreaths and festoons of the delicate mountain fringe. A group of persons was seated upon the gallery enjoying the twilight. His eye at a glance embraced the individuals composing it. One of them was a large stout gentleman about fifty, with an air of pride and self-consideration.

Near him were two beautiful children riding together upon a rocking horse and making the gothic arches of the hall ring with their glee. Farther off at the extremity of the gallery lounged an elegant looking young man upon a settee, engaged in smoking a cigar and playing with a young grey-hound.

The young foot-traveler approached the portico, and catching the eye of the elderly gentleman, raised his hat and bowing, advanced and said,

"I believe this is the residence of Dr. Sheridine?"

"Yes. Who do you wish to see?" demanded Dr. Sheridine in a cold tone, surveying him from head to foot.

"Dr. Sheridine, sir!" answered the young man respectfully.

"Well, what have you to say?"

"I have a letter for you, sir, if you are that gentleman," answered the student; and taking it from his pocket he handed it to him.

After Dr. Sheridine, who had been formerly a celebrated practitioner of medicine in New York and had now retired on a fortune, had finished the perusal of the letter written to him by his friend at the university, he slowly folded the letter, regarding closely as he did so, the features of the applicant for the tutorship in his family. At length with a more hospitable and friendly look than he had hitherto worn, he said, though still in the pompous tone characteristic of the man,

"Well, Mr. Winder, I have read your Professor's letter. He speaks favorably of you. I am glad to see you! I like your promptness. Walk in and take a seat. Edgar, this young man is Mr. Winder, our tutor! This is my son, Mr. Winder."

Edgar Sheridine bowed haughtily without rising from his lounging position, and then began to caress his greyhound as if no Mr. Charles Winder was in existence.

"When did you leave the University?" asked Dr. Sheridine of the young student.

"Five days since. I stopped a day at my mother's in a village in Vermont and proceeded to Albany and took a sloop to the village above! I was two days on the river!"

"You should have come in a steamer! You would have been here yesterday morning," said Dr. Sheridine, bluntly.

"My resources are not very great, sir," answered Charles, smiling, "and it became me to husband my little funds."

"Economy is a great virtue! You hear that, Edgar! I wish you would take a lesson from Mr. Winder."

"Mr. Winder has not come here to be my tutor, nor do I think I shall condescend to be his pupil. Economy is very well in poor students; but in a rich young man like myself it is absurd!"

"Rich, you spendthrift?" repeated the doctor with a chuckle, as if quite gratified to know that he had a rich son, this fact implying wealth in himself; "you wouldn't have a penny but for me, you dog!"

"And so long as you have a penny I shall be assured, sir," responded the young gentleman with an indolent air.

"Well, so you behave yourself and don't buy any more horses or hounds, I'll not talk to you about economy, Ed!"

"It will do no good, sir," responded the fashionable young heir, in a cavalier tone. "Spring upon him, Antelope! That is right, roll him over, my beautiful 'Telly,' he cried, as the grey-hound, after long watching his opportunity, sprang at the shrinking little terrier and turned him over and over half a dozen times with the rapidity of thought. Spiegle alarmed, sprang up from the ground and ran crying to conceal himself under the chair on which his master was seated; while the latter patted him, spoke a few soothing words to him, and then with difficulty restrained himself from sending an indignant glance at the young man; Spiegle, though small and far from comely, was very dear to him, having been with him during his four years in college, and a partner in all his walks and pastimes. Much rather would he have had the grey-hound spring upon his own neck than thus rudely serve his helpless little companion.

He felt indignant at the conduct of the young man, and nothing but the reflection that giving vent to his feelings of anger would lose him his place as tutor, prevented him from showing by his flashing eyes the strong resentment of his bosom.

"I should like to know, Doctor," said Edgar Sheridine, discovering that "the tutor" was annoyed, "I should like to know if you have engaged the Scotch terrier as well as his master?"

"Why, bless you, no! what a question!"

"Probably the gentleman would like to have a place for him as well as for himself. He seems to be a well-bred animal, and I dare say might teach Antelope and my hounds some lessons of value."

"You are a funny dog yourself, Edgar! I don't want any Scotch terriers! nor Mr. Winder I suppose. Is that little black animal yours, Mr. Winder?"

"Yes, sir. I have had him five years. He is my best friend. We have lived so long together that we are much attached to each other. In college he was constantly with me!"

"That is what I said, Doctor! The dog has been through college like his master. I propose you put him on a salary also!"

"I shall have no dogs here but yours! You have enough of them. Mr. Winder you will send away your dog, if you remain here. Edgar doesn't like him I see, and what he doesn't like can't stay here!"

The young student was about to yield to the quick impulse of his wounded feelings and promptly say that he would not remain without his dog and that if he was to be subjected to such insults as he had met with already, he did not desire to remain at all, and haughtily to bid them "good evening," when the approach of a carriage and two or three persons on horseback up the avenue checked the words that were struggling on his lips for utterance.

CHAPTER II.

THE STUDENT MEETS HIS FATE.

THE carriage, which was a light and elegant phaeton drawn by two bay horses, after whirling swiftly round the green oval drew up in front of the gallery. Behind it cantered side by side a youth about fourteen years of age and a beautiful cherry-cheeked little maiden of sixteen. The phaeton contained a fine looking old gentleman about three-score, and a brilliant spirited girl of nineteen, with dark eyes and a head and figure like a Juno.

"Ah, General, good evening, I am glad to see you at Laurel Park!" cried Dr. Sheridine rising and approaching the carriage: "and you Miss Rosabel are welcome too! Bright eyes and beauty always find favor in my eyes, albeit I am on the other side of fifty!"

"We thought we would take advantage of the fine twi-

light, Doctor, and take a drive over in company with your young people," answered General Liffingwell.

"The doctor I dare say compliments himself that I come expressly to see him, he being a gay widower;" said Miss Liffingwell smiling archly.

"No, I don't go quite so far; Edgar here would be stepping across my path and steal all my honors!"

Young Sheridine had thrown away his segar and hastened to the phaeton with a beaming smile upon his truly fine features, and had passed round on the opposite side where Miss Liffingwell was seated.

"You will alight, Rosabel," he said fixing upon her his eyes with an expression that betrayed a deep regard for her. "You really honored us by coming. Allow me to assist you!"

"You are very kind, Mr. Sheridine," answered the young lady in a quiet indifferent tone that contrasted greatly the warmth which he had made his offer of aid; "but I can alight without assistance if father intends stopping; besides there is your sister Clara waiting for a cavalier to assist her from her horse!"

"O Clara has Frank to help her!" replied Edgar Sheridine slightly knitting his brows and biting his lip.

"I think we shall hardly get out, it is so late," answered the young lady.

"That can't be allowed, Miss Rosa," cried the Doctor, "you visit us so seldom, that now we have you we must keep you. One would suppose you lived five leagues instead of five miles!"

"It is as Rosa says," answered the General.

"Then I believe we will return, dear father."

"You would have alighted if you had not found me at home, Miss Liffingwell," said Edgar with a displeased look.

She turned away her face and seemed not to hear him. In the direction which her gaze took her eye fell full upon the noble figure and frank intelligent countenance of the handsome student. She let her gaze rest for full a minute upon his fair face with surprise and interest. As he was not looking towards her, she regarded him without being observed. She was struck with his appearance and was inspired by a desire to learn who he was.

"Pray, Mr. Sheridine, who is your young friend in the gallery?" she asked in an under tone and addressing Edgar as if he had not just spoken to her in a voice of angry emotion.

"That young man is some poor student, I believe, whom the doctor has engaged to teach Frank and Clara," answered the young man with as much civility as he could command towards herself, but with a tone of contempt in reference to Charles Winder.

Miss Liffingwell glanced slightly at the speaker and then smiling as if she understood his nature answered with a second look at Winder.

"He looks like a very intellectual young man. I think from his appearance you must find him a valuable acquaintance to your family."

"Who did you understand the gentleman was?" asked General Liffingwell of his daughter.

"Dr. Sheridine's tutor."

"Ah, then you have one at last, Doctor. I like his looks. Call him up and present him. I should like to give him an invitation to ride over and see us some leisure afternoon. I have, you know, a very large library, and he might like to run over the books!"

Dr. Sheridine looked a little surprised; for he had no idea of making a companion or equal of a tutor. So that he gave him a room, the use of a horse when he wished to ride, and regularly paid him his salary, he did not conceive that he had any thing more to do with him than with his gardener. Indeed he had been deliberating whether he should let him eat at his own table or have his meals with the house-keeper and nursery maid; for the retired physician had high and ultra notions of aristocratic exclusiveness. He had learned that the nobility in England regarded a tutor as merely a hired dependant, and never thought of

letting him associate with the family. He had about made up his mind before Charles's arrival to treat him in the same manner. "We have no nobility in this country, it is true," argued the self-enriched doctor, "but all wealthy retired gentlemen stand in place of it, and what they want in title and rank they must make up in exclusiveness."

These sentiments were precisely those of Edgar, though a little more thoroughly systematized in practical application. Dr. Sheridine, was therefore surprised that General Leffingwell, whose aristocracy was of the first water, should make such a proposition. He, however, bowed and turned to our hero, who had been with his eye watching the play of the fountain, but thinking in his heart about leaving, and refusing to remain at Laurel Park, where his feelings as a man and a gentleman were so little respected as they had been.

"Mr. Winder, will you walk up to the carriage," said Dr. Sheridine.

Charles approached, and lifting his hat, as his eyes rested on the beautiful face of Miss Leffingwell, he bowed with native courtesy, and then looked at Dr. Sheridine as if to inquire why he had called to him.

"General Leffingwell does you the honor, to desire to have you presented to him," said Edgar, in a haughty, slightly, sneering tone. "Your name I think is Winslow?"

Charles made no reply. His cheek burned. He knew not that he had miscalled his name purposely. He was about to make a stern reply when he met Rosabel Leffingwell's eye. In them was a look that spoke as eloquently as words "forbear!" His fiery spirit yielded to the power of that glance, and he answered calmly.

"Winder, is my name, sir."

"Yes, Window. It is so transparent a name I wonder I did not see through it at once. Miss Leffingwell, allow me the distinguished honor of introducing to your notice Mr. Charles Window, tutor to Dr. Sheridine. Here is his little dog also. Mr. Window if you will give me his name, I will do myself the honor of presenting him also. I dare say Miss Leffingwell would like to know the whole family!"

The haughty, sarcastic tone in which he spoke, the bitter, sneering expression of his face, would have driven from his equanimity one less accustomed to curb his emotions than Charles Winder. He grew very pale, but kept his temper.

"You are in error, Mr. Sheridine," said Rosabel Leffingwell, "if you think your malicious wit is agreeable to me. I understand your feeling and movements, and they only serve to lessen you in my consideration. Father, the night air is heavy. Shall we drive homeward?"

"Yes, yes, But I have not spoken to Mr. Winder, having been talking with the Doctor. My dear sir, as the duties of teaching are arduous and you will require a good deal of recreation. I hope you will extend your walks and rides as far down as 'Monmouth.' That is the name of my place, so called by my father, who was in the battle of Monmouth. You will always be welcomed there, sir; and I dare say I have in my library some rare books that will please you. If I am not at home, 'Bel here will be, and she was never yet known to be diffident in hospitality to her father's guests!"

"I shall be happy to see Mr. Winder, and should he call I trust he will find at least a friendly welcome," answered Miss Leffingwell, with marked emphasis upon the adverb, at the same time looking fixedly at Edgar Sheridine. "Good evening, gentlemen," she said slightly touching the bay ponies with a slender, ivory handled whip she held in her hand, for she was driving the phaeton herself. The spirited animals bounded off at a fleet trot, and in a few moments the carriage was lost to the eye in the distant winding of the avenue.

Charles Winder remained a few seconds standing where the carriage had left him, thinking upon the lovely face of Rosabel Leffingwell, and the cautioning glance which she had given him as she saw him about to resent the insult which Sheridine had put upon him.

"So, sir, you are my tutor?" cried a richly-toned voice close to his ear, while at the same time he felt a smart blow

with a riding whip upon his left shoulder. He turned with surprise and beheld Clara Sheridine, a wild, mirthful, spoiled hoyden of sixteen, as beautiful and mischievous as any half dozen school girls to be found in the country round.

"Yes, I suppose that I am to be," he answered with a smile, after regarding her brilliant features shaded by raven-black curls, above which was saucily perched a coquettish gipsy riding-hat. Her neat figure was encased in a long, green habit with a flowing skirt, which she had thrown across her arm. Beneath it peeped forth the neatest little boot, laced about the prettiest ankle in the world.

"Well, I like your looks very well, and I dare say we shall agree amazingly. Can you ride?"

"Yes!"

"Do you love to ride fast?"

"Yes!"

"Then we will have many a fine gallop. Frank is a dull beau, and Edgar won't ride with anybody but Rosa Leffingwell when she will go with him."

"Why, sister, how rude you are," said Frank, a lad of fourteen, with a generous and open expression; "Mr. Winder, I hope you won't mind her. She is always foolish. My father says you are engaged to instruct us. You shall find a hard scholar in me if you do find a dull one in Clara!"

"You see my two children here, Mr. Winder," said Dr. Sheridine. "They are to be your pupils. You must fit Frank for College, and Clara for—"

"College too, father!" answered the merry girl. "I know more Latin now than Frank."

"And are ten times more of a boy," said Dr. Sheridine. "But I don't mean that Frank isn't manly enough. Come, Mr. Winder, walk into the dining-room. These two little ones you saw riding the rock-horse, are my babies. They are in the nursery yet. They think more of toys than lexicons as yet. Come, sir, we shall have tea soon, and after tea we will arrange matters for your future duties."

Our hero had nearly decided to leave Laurel Hill when the carriage drove up, and doubtless would have done so if he had not seen Rosabel Leffingwell; but after he had seen her, and a certain kind of confidence had been created between them by her glance of warning, he felt inclined to remain in a place where he might have the privilege at times of enjoying the society of a person whom he saw was as intelligent and generous-tempered as she was matchlessly lovely. The sight of his two pupils, also confirmed him in his opinion to remain; for the bold, spirited, manner of Clara, and the open-hearted, amiable bearing of Frank, interested and pleased him. He resolved, therefore, to bear with the haughty contempt of Edgar, whose sudden dislike to him he could not divine, unless he measured it by his own feelings, for he had, at the very first sight, conceived against him a decided antipathy. The secret of the former's conduct, however, was his aristocratic contempt of those beneath him, and a habit he indulged in of treating with bold insult all whom he did not desire to recognize. He cared not for the feelings of any one, but with heartless jests and cutting wit, always displayed his own fancied superiority, however deeply it wounded. Charles Winder's antipathy to him was nothing more than that sentiment of intellectual contempt which a person of sense instinctively feels toward a fashionable young man whose only merit consists in his horses, his dress and his money; the consciousness of which throws around him an air, vain, cold and repulsive, and chilling even to generous-eyed charity. Winder had seen and comprehended his character at a glance, and although he did not dislike him ere he heard him speak, he felt in his heart he was a man whom he could never love.

"Where is Edgar?" demanded Dr. Sheridine, as they were entering the house.

"He has taken my horse and is galloping down the avenue," cried Frank.

"Where can he be going? Well, we must take tea without him."

"I dare say he has gone to escort Rosabel home," answered Clara.

"If I thought so, I should be sorry; for my pony has been ten miles this afternoon, and I don't care that he shall have ten more to go."

Clara's guess was right. The young man had stood, gloomy and stern, gazing after the phaeton till it was out of sight, when, as if urged by a sudden impulse, he leaped into the saddle of his brother's horse, and rode at full speed in the direction which he had taken.

CHAPTER III.

STOPPED BY ROGUES.

EDGAR Sheridine followed after the phaeton at a rapid pace about a mile beyond the gate came within sight of it. It was already so near night that he could scarcely distinguish it from the shadows of the forest-road along which Rosabel was rapidly urging her horses. He reined up for a little as if to calm all emotion, and then galloping onward appeared suddenly along side of the carriage.

"Good evening, General. A fine night you have to drive home in, Miss Rosabel," he said in a gay manner.

"Why, bless us, Mr. Sheridine, is it you?" cried the General. "I was wondering who it was riding so after us."

"I thought I would ride after you and accompany you home, as it was late and would be quite dark before you reached your place!"

"You need not to have put yourself to so much trouble, Mr. Sheridine," said Rosabel Leffingwell, coldly. "I have no fears, as the road is good and perfectly secure. You had best return, and not take so long a ride uselessly."

"I shall not be so ungallant, fair Rosabel, after having once started to escort a lady, to draw rein and suffer her to proceed alone!"

The young lady made no reply; but her horses started forward at a fleet pace as if obeying a more expressive pressure upon the reins. The young gentleman rode fast and free to keep up with the carriage, and more than once he fell behind it ere they reached Monmouth. At length some time after dark, the phaeton drew up in front of the main entrance to the beautiful villa, and Edgar flung himself from his saddle to assist the maiden to alight from the carriage. She scarcely touched his proffered hand, but lightly bounded to the marble step and then gave her father her arm to aid him in ascending into the hall.

"George," she said to the hostler, "you will take more than usual care of the horses, for they have been driven very fast, and the night is very chilly. Mr. Sheridine, will you have your horses sent round to the stable?" she asked, with a courtesy that became a lady addressing a guest to whom she merely wished to show ordinary hospitality.

"I shall return shortly. Leave him at the rack!" said Edgar in a tone that betrayed some agitation of feeling. It was too dark to distinguish the expression of his features.

"Walk in and have supper with us, Edgar," said the General.

"Thank you, I will go in for a few moments."

They entered the brightly lighted hall and passed into the parlor. Here they seated themselves and discoursed a few moments upon indifferent subjects. Edgar was ill at ease. His brow was knitted and his lips were incessantly working with some deep emotion. At length he rose, and advancing to Rosabel, he said in an under tone,

"I have a few words of deep interest to say to you. Will you go with me to the piazza?"

"I will hear you here. My father is going into the library," she answered as General Leffingwell at that moment rose and went out into the hall.

"Rosabel—I mean Miss Leffingwell," said Edgar, after having remained a few moments alone with her, and walking up and down before her in a state of indecision; "I have rode hither to-night to ask you once for all to tell me what my fate is?"

"Your fate, sir?" asked the maiden with a look of naughty surprise.

"Yes, Miss Leffingwell. You need not be told that I have long loved you—that you are dearer —"

"I cannot listen to such expressions, sir. If I have unfortunately inspired in you any sentiments beyond those of mere neighborly acquaintance, I deeply regret it for my sake as well as for your own; for be assured, Mr. Sheridine, 'once for all' that they have not been nor can they be reciprocated!"

"Then why have you held out to me such hopes?" demanded Sheridine with a darkening brow.

"I was not aware, sir, that I had done so!" answered Miss Leffingwell, calmly.

"Have you not permitted me to escort you on horseback?"

"I have, sir, and many other gentlemen; but had I supposed you presumed upon my acceptance of this civility to cherish the vain hopes you have given utterance to but just now, I should have declined your attentions!"

"But you have treated me with marked favor. You have accepted bouquets of flowers—music—nay, books!"

"True, but I did not receive them as pledges of love, sir; certainly I accepted them only as gifts of friendship. But this was, Mr. Sheridine, when I believed you were all a gentleman should be!"

"And what has changed your opinion of me now, Madam?" demanded the young man fiercely.

"I cannot suffer you to address me in this manner, Mr. Sheridine. If you forget what you owe to me as a lady, I do not?"

"Pardon me! Remain, Miss Leffingwell, and hear me. What has changed your opinion of me?"

"I do not desire to explain to you what you can very well understand. In a word you do not possess my esteem!"

"Why then," he said with an embarrassed air, "why then did you drive to Laurel Park this evening? If you despise me, as you say, why should you visit where you know you will meet with me?"

"I do not feel that your presence any where Mr. Sheridine should influence my movements. My father proposed to accompany your brother and sister home after their afternoon visit, and I consented without any reference to yourself. I regret you should suppose that I have you so much in mind!"

"You are certainly the most coolly insulting person——"

"Nay, you forget yourself, Mr. Sheridine. I wish you good evening. You will excuse me if I see you no more to-night!"

"Forgive me, Rosabel! I madly love you. I had hoped that you ——"

"Release my hand, Mr. Sheridine. If you base your hopes upon the little gifts you have sent me in the last three years, they shall be returned to you without delay. I regret that you should have construed mere kindness into a deeper sentiment. I am glad this interview has taken place that you may be thoroughly undeceived."

With these words Rosabel Leffingwell left the apartment with a quiet air of dignity and self-possession that strikingly contrasted with his fierce and angry agitation. He stood gazing after her until she had disappeared; and then clenching his hands he muttered within his shut teeth some fierce words of revenge mingled with bitter reflections upon himself for his humiliation before her. The next moment he was in his saddle galloping at a furious rate away from the villa in the direction of the highway that passed near it.

Charles Winder had been several days an inmate of the mansion at Laurel Park. He found his duties pleasant, and having won the esteem and confidence of his two pupils, he found it a light task to instruct them. He was occupied but six hours in the day with them, the rest of his time being his own. That portion of it which he did not give to study of his future profession, he spent in walking in the neighborhood, and sometimes in riding on horseback as the

escort of his wild pupil Clara, whom he found a much better rider than himself, though he thought he was by no means an indifferent horseman. Dr. Sheridine as he became acquainted with him took a hasty liking to him, and throwing down some of his exclusive aristocratic walls, suffered him to act in the house as if he was one of the family. Edgar had not been at home since the morning after the evening he had gone in pursuit of the phaeton containing General and Miss Leffingwell. Late that night he had returned and retired to his room; but early in the morning left for New York in the first steamer. He had, therefore, been free from his presence, and by so much his happiness had been augmented. Spiegle, too, had received favor. He became a particular favorite of the wild Clara's, who always took the freak into her head to love everything that was ugly or persecuted.

Thus our hero's days passed with serenity and satisfaction to himself as well as to others, and he felt that his "lines were truly cast on pleasant places." One morning he had been requested by Clara to ride with her to visit a romantic glen in which was a picturesque mill and waterfall. It was about four miles distant, and as Charles was an excellent sketcher, at her suggestion he took his drawing book for the purpose of making a sketch of it.

Frank accompanied them for a couple of miles with his fowling-piece across his saddle, and then turned off with two dogs which followed him, to hunt rabbits and partridges until they should return that way.

After a lively gallop along a very interesting road, which at one time gave them a distant view of the river dotted with sails, and at another wound along the bosom of a deep valley with a brook gurgling past at their feet, they came in sight of the mill and cascade buried in a deep glen amid wooded precipices which almost shut out the sun. After they had rode around it and sufficiently admired the lovely spot, Charles selected a site for making a drawing of it. He had begun to make the outline, Clara bending over and watching the bold movements of his pencil with interest, when her attention was drawn by two persons riding along the road on the opposite side of the brook, which was shallow and filled with large rocks, and about fifty yards in width.

"Who can they be? One is a lady," said Clara, "in a moment when they get along by that opening where the trees won't much conceal them, we can see who they are."

"It is Miss Leffingwell," exclaimed Charles with a quick flush of pleasurable emotion, as the young lady was now clearly seen pacing along the path that skirted the brook. She carried in her hand a fishing-rod and a fisherman's basket hung at the horn of her saddle. She wore a broad-brimmed sun-hat, and a dark colored close-fitting habit. A little ways behind her was a servant who also carried a rod.

"They are going fishing up to the lake above the cascade," said Clara.

"Who is that with her?" asked Charles.

"It is her footman, George. He always attends her when her father can't go out; though for my part I would rather ride alone, as I have done a hundred times, than be tagged after by a dull servant-man, to see that one don't get hurt or fall into mischief!"

Winder smiled at the tone in which she spoke, and was mentally of the opinion that much supervision was very needful for his wild pupil.

"Is the lake far?"

"But a quarter of a mile. The fishing rock is just under that tall elm you see towering in the distance. I will shout to her! She doesn't see us!"

"Those two men who are riding a little ways behind them will doubtless think you are calling to them, Miss Clara. After I finish my sketch we will ride up to where they fish. There is a bridge near, I suppose, by which we can cross?"

"Yes below this; but I should rather take the brook in my saddle.

"It can be easily forded, for that matter, with a leaping

pole I could cross it from stone to stone without wetting the sole of my boot! Those two men seem to be afraid to ride by Rosabel; they hang back, though their horses seem to be impatient to bound forward. What fine animals they are. How beautifully the bay one this way throws out his fore feet! They must be cold to muffle up so; though the morning air is just bracing enough to please me. Look up, Mr. Winder! They are riding forward now at a round pace. They will pass Rosabel and her servant before she gets to that clump of willows! Now if that was me I would whip up and ride like the wind before I would let anybody pass me! I always like to see persons try it when I am out riding. I never was passed but once, and that was by you; and I shall repay you, sir, by going past you some day! See! What can that mean, Mr. Winder?" exclaimed Clara with a look of surprise and alarm, and grasping Charles by the shoulder. "See the two horsemen are assaulting them! One of them has seized the servant-man, and the other has taken Rosa's horse by the rein and is turning him back. She strikes the man over the head with her whip! She calls for aid! The servant is struggling as if for life with the other! What, oh, what, can this mean! Let us ride to their aid."

Before she had half-finished the above sentence, Charles had leaped into his saddle and was dashing across the wildly foaming brook. She was the next moment following him, urging her horse at tremendous leaps! But before she had crossed half way, Charles Winder had gained the opposite bank and was spurring at full speed towards the parties in the road.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESCUE.

As Winder approached he saw that the servant had been dragged from his horse by the horseman and that both were upon their feet struggling fiercely together. Miss Leffingwell was a little distance from them using every exertion to free her bridle from the grasp of the other horseman who, having also thrown his arm around her waist, was endeavoring to urge both horses upon the run; but the pressure upon the bit of her animal only caused him to turn rapidly round and round in a circle.

Charles dashed past the two men and the next instant his hand was upon the collar of the ruffian who had seized Rosabel. The suddenness of his appearance, and the violence of his attack took the man by surprise; and before he could defend himself he lay upon the ground with Winder's foot upon his breast; the whole was the act of an instant. The liberated horse of the man dashed off at full gallop down the road with flying stirrups, followed by the servant, who had also got free. The courageous Miss Leffingwell had retained her saddle, fierce as the contest had been between her and her assailant, and now being released from his grasp she was able to look round and see who had so opportunely come to her rescue. She instantly recognized the young tutor of Laurel Park, but it was no time to speak her congratulations. Winder had not yet conquered her enemy though he had him beneath his foot. He was unarmed and held him by physical force to the ground.

There was a momentary pause as Charles placed his foot upon the man's breast, during which he took from his pocket a small pocket-knife and opening the sharp, slender blade bent over him. He now saw that the man wore a mask over his face of steel-board colored to imitate the natural complexion.

"Villain," he cried, "unmask or I will tear your covering from your face; and offer to struggle and I will take your life as surely as I now stand upon your body."

The man made no reply. Charles was about to tear off his mask, when he made a desperate struggle to rise and succeeded in throwing him off and springing to his feet. Charles grasped his arm and endeavored to secure him.

"What mean you by this attack upon this lady?"

The ruffian did not speak a word, but drawing a dirk, with a well-given blow, wounded Charles, deep in the shoulder so as to cause him to release his hold; and then turning from him he ran rapidly away leaped into the saddle of his comrade's horse, which was standing quietly, by the hedge, and galloped off at top-speed. The other seeing him fly, let go his hold upon the throat of the servant whom he had been firmly holding all the while, and bounding across the hedge ran like a deer into the woods, in the thickets of which he disappeared. Clara would have taken to the hedge in pursuit had she not been anxious to know if Rosabel had been harmed.

Charles had sprang into his saddle and was about to follow the mounted assailant, when Miss Leffingwell laid her hand upon his bridle-arm.

"Do not go, Mr. Winder! They have fled. I am in safety. How shall I thank you for your gallant conduct! How wonderful that you should have been so near at hand! You have my heartfelt thanks, sir!"

"I am rewarded by seeing you safe, Miss Leffingwell," answered Charles; but in so faint a tone that she looked earnestly at him, when she saw that his countenance was as pale as marble and his saddle was stained with blood.

"You are hurt, sir! Is it possible that you have been wounded?" she cried with wild alarm.

"The man had a small dagger in his hand when he struck me as he broke away, and it penetrated my shoulder under the collar bone. It is trifling! Do not be alarmed!"

"Mr. Winder will fall from his saddle, Clara! Help!" cried Rosabel as Charles bowed his head suddenly to the saddle-bow and lay like one dead upon it.

"He has fainted!" exclaimed Clara. "See how his breast bleeds! He is killed!"

"No! No! No! What a fearful time! George, come hither and help lift Mr. Winder to the ground!" cried Rosa, who with Clara Sheridine had already alighted and was sustaining the unconscious young man upon his horse. Clara was weeping like a child, while Rosa was pale but calm and self-possessed. The deepest gratitude and commiseration mingled filled her bosom for her brave preserver who had periled his life in her defence.

With the assistance of the trembling footman, Charles was lifted from the saddle and laid upon a green bank by the side of the running brook. Rosa took off her large sun-hat to fan his brow while Clara brought water in her cap to bathe his temples. George, in the meanwhile, was unclosing his cravat and seeking for the wound to assuage the blood. It was found a few inches above the heart, a small but deep orifice.

"A little more, Miss, and it would have been over with him," said the man.

"Then isn't it mortal, George?"

"Oh, no, I guess not! It isn't in the heart, but just forward of the shoulder. It is pretty bad though and will take a good deal of care to set him right again!"

"He shall have every attention that gratitude can bestow," answered Miss Leffingwell warmly.

"Take my handkerchief, George," said Clara; "double it into several folds and lay it upon the wound, and then bind it on firmly with Rosa's. It will stop the bleeding until we can have a surgeon! I am now going to ride for one at full gallop!" added the spirited young girl. "Poor Mr. Winder, how pale he looks! I do hope he will not die!"

"Do not speak of death, dear Clara!" cried Rosa with horror. "Ride at once. George and I will stay by him. As soon as you have seen Doctor Wells, cross to father's and order the carriage to be sent for him!"

"But he is not to be taken to Monmouth," said Clara.

"By all means. It is four miles to Laurel Park, and but one home!"

"Well, I will do just as you say, Rosa," answered Clara; and springing lightly into her saddle she whipped up and was soon out of sight.

"What if she should fall in with those ruffians?" exclaimed Rosabel, now for the first time thinking of the

cause of all this distress that had come upon her; for in the anxiety about Charles neither herself nor Clara had given a second thought to the two men, or interchanged a word of surprise or inquiry touching the cause of the assault. Rosa now trembled for Clara's safety, as she had taken the very road along which the horsemen had fled.

"She would not mind them the crack of a whip if she did. I don't think she thinks of them, Miss!" answered George, as he finished bandaging the wound. "But I suspect the way they went off that they won't stop now to trouble any one. I thought that fellow would have shot me more than once. He held a pistol at my head and swore he'd do it if I stirred!"

"Don't speak of it now, George," answered Miss Leffingwell with a shudder. "I tremble now like a leaf at what occurred!"

"And yet you didn't lose courage at the time."

"I looked at you and thought you showed spirit enough for a soldier. Indeed, if you had not given him the smart blows over the face you did he might have got quite off with you and your horse! But his face was made of paste-board I suppose like my gentleman's. Bless us! mine had a nose and a beard that one would swear belonged to Brobdignag or some other monstrous giant they tell of!"

"Mr. Winder is moving! He is not dead, George! I have been watching his face till it seemed to me it was that of a corpse. His pulse throbs!"

"The wound is a bad one, Miss Rose, but he will get over it if the surgeon comes in time!"

"Clara will not spare whip on such an occasion as this! It is but a mile and a quarter to Dr. Wells' house. She will ride it in five minutes! If he is at home he will be here in ten more. In half an hour we will have him safe at the Hall. I am grieved that he should have incurred all this for me. I can never repay him for his conduct! Who could the men have been?"

"Highway robbers, Miss, no less!" answered George, as he examined the bandage of the wound, Charles' head lying upon his arm, while Rosabel bending over him, continued to fan him with her hat, her face expressive of the most tender sympathy. At intervals she would cease and silently gaze upon him, or with her snowy fingers put back the rich brown locks of hair that fell across his temples, or lay them upon his pulse with the most watchful solicitude.

Minutes seemed to her hours as she waited for returning consciousness, ever and anon looking up the road and listening for the sound of approaching surgical aid.

"No, they were not robbers, George," she at length answered. "If they had been they would have demanded money at once and taken it and departed."

"On the contrary you were not robbed, nor was my purse demanded. The first thing he did was to ride up along side of my horse, seize him by the bridle, turn his head and prepare to gallop with me back the way we had come. He spoke not a word, but merely tried to press the horses forward. I then resisted by using my riding-whip upon him, and in the contest the horses flew about in a circle. It was at this crisis Mr. Winder made his appearance. When I saw him coming I supposed it was another of the party and gave myself up for lost!"

"He acted bravely and deserves all the praise that can be said of him, Miss. Poor gentleman, he has fared hard for it, but don't fear but that he will get over it."

"Who were the men then, if they were not highway-men?" asked George stoutly.

"That is impossible to tell! They were evil persons who designed to do us a mischief. Their object in thus attacking a lady attended by a servant in open day on an open road I am at a loss to divine; and attempt, too, to gallop off with me!"

"It seems odd, too. They would have galloped off with you. I'm afraid, if it had'n't been for this gentleman; for I was of no more service than a dead crow, miss. I fought hard to come to your aid till I see the muzzle o' that pistol starin' me in the eyes, and then I felt it became me to be quiet!"

"I don't blame you, George. You did all you could! Hark! There is the sound of horse's hoofs! It is Clara riding back like the wind."

"Dr. Wells is close at hand," cried the young girl. "I sent his man over for the coach. How is poor Mr. Winder. —I hope he has spoken?" she added as she reined up beneath the oak at the foot of which he lay, and sprang to the ground by his side. "How very pale he is!"

"He has moved his head slightly once; but otherwise has remained just as you see him," answered Rose sadly. "How far behind is the surgeon?"

"There he comes upon the hand-gallop. His old bald-eyed horse I dare say, has never had such a race since he was a colt. But I told the doctor he must ride as if he was in for a silver cup!"

"Clara how can you speak so lightly?"

"Indeed, I didn't mean to. I suppose it is my way. Nobody gives me credit for any heart. But I have had my eyes so full of tears all the way there and back that I couldn't see and had to give 'Billy Button' the bridle."

"Forgive me, Clara. If I had looked, I should have seen that while you spoke so lightly, your beautiful eyes were moist! Now our fears or hopes will be realized! Dr. Wells can decide in a few moments."

"Miss Leffingwell, good morning! What has happened?" cried Dr. Wells, a short, round, bald-headed, little intelligent-looking man, as he alighted from a very tall, bony, white mare. "Who is hurt and how? Been thrown I dare say, in trying to outride Miss Sheridine, for I prophesy she will first break half the young men's necks in the country, and then break her own!"

"Didn't you tell Dr. Wells what had occurred?" asked Rosabel.

"Not a word. I merely gave him my errand that a wounded man needed his aid, despatched his serving man to Monmouth for the coach and then rode back again."

"Yes, she speaks truth. She took a sort of swoop about my horse like a hawk on the wing, telling me her errand as she galloped, and then, whisk! was away!"

"This gentleman, doctor, is very dangerously hurt, I fear. If you will give his case your serious attention without delay, you will oblige me!"

"Certainly, Miss Leffingwell. Ah, blood! I had supposed only stunned by the fall!"

"The gentleman has not had a fall, sir. He has been wounded in the front part of the shoulder! Show him the wound, George. Remove the bandages carefully!"

"Bless my soul! A stab above the heart. This is a serious affair, indeed!"

"Is it fatal, sir? He fainted a few moments afterwards and has not stirred since, but laid there pale and lifeless."

"It is a bad wound. I will probe it. How is it possible he should have received such a wound?"

"Two highwaymen attacked Miss Rose to rob her of her purse," said George, firm in his original opinion of the character of the two men, "and this young gentleman came up and rescued her!"

"In the act, Dr. Wells, he received this wound from a dirk," added Rosabel with deep emotion.

"What became of the men?" asked the doctor, as he coolly inserted his probe into the orifice.

"They fled; one on horseback, the other on foot!"

"It is a very strange circumstance, very. This young gentleman deserves great credit, very great indeed. I am happy to say, Miss Leffingwell, that the wound though deep, is not dangerous!"

"God be thanked for it!" exclaimed Rosabel, clasping her hands, and looking gratefully towards Heaven.

"Two inches lower and it would have pierced into the heart, and an inch to the right and it would have penetrated the lungs. Has he lost much blood?"

"It bled freely for a few moments after he fainted, until George stopped it. Ought he not to be brought too?"

"I will open a vein in his arm after I have closed and dressed the wound!"

The flow of the blood from the arm produced the desired effect. The wounded young man slowly opened his eyes and gazed around him with a look of intelligence and wonder.

CHAPTER V.

THE AMBUSCADE.

THE carriage at length arrived from Monmouth, and our hero was enabled with the assistance of the surgeon and George to enter it. Miss Leffingwell and Dr. Wells followed him into it, and Clara rode by the window, George taking a seat with the coachman.

Charles was too feeble to converse during the ride, but two or three times expressed his pleasure that Miss Leffingwell was safe. She, in return, renewed her ardent words of gratitude for his services.

During the progress of the carriage homeward Dr. Wells was very busily engaged in conjectures about the highwaymen, and their motives in making so extraordinary an attack in so public a manner; but he could arrive at no satisfactory result. His opinion, however, inclined to the belief that their intention was to run away with her and detain her until they could obtain a large ransom. Rosabel had no such romantic idea. A suspicion had crossed her mind as she was bending over the wounded young man, fanning him, by the brook-side, which had given to the persons and their motives an entirely different character.

The coach at length stopped at Monmouth Hall, and Charles was conveyed to a room. His wound was then again looked to by the surgeon, and he there received all that attention his critical condition demanded. Rosa hovered around his pillow from day to day with the devotion of a guardian angel. Clara rode every morning to inquire after him, and even Dr. Sheridine paid Monmouth Hall three visits to see the patient.

In the meanwhile, the noise of the event had spread through the country, and rewards were offered both by the authorities and by General Leffingwell for the discovery and apprehension of the ruffians. But three weeks passed and no trace of them was discovered; and no hint, even, obtained by which their identity could be guessed at. It became the universal opinion that the motive which had led to the assault was robbery, as it was known Miss Leffingwell was a rich heiress, and it was thought the highwaymen hoped to find both money and jewels upon her person. Rosa said nothing to change the prevailing sentiment, though she had taken a very different view of the affair, and had little doubt as to the person of one, at least, of the two men.

Our hero, at the end of three weeks, was able to walk his room leaning upon the arm of the grateful girl, who felt that she could never pay to her preserver the debt of gratitude she owed to him. It will be surmised, of course, that out of an intercourse between two such persons as Charles Winder and Rosabel Leffingwell, began under the peculiar circumstances which it did there must naturally have grown a mutual interest in their hearts for one another. Gratitude is the soil in which love takes deepest root and thrives most vigorously; and love day by day bound their hearts together; and ere they knew they loved they were lovers!

At length Charles recovered so far as to ride out in the carriage accompanied by the General and his daughter; whose cheeks, hitherto paled by anxiety for the life of one who had been near death on her account, once more recovered their bloom, and her dark eyes their brilliancy. General Leffingwell was not blind to the work that close and intimate companionship between his wounded guest and his daughter, had effected in her heart; but as he saw nothing to object to in her intimacy with a deserving young

man who had, perhaps, saved her from death by the hands of her assailants, he did not interpose any obstacles to its progress.

Daily the rides were prolonged, until Charles being able to ride five or six miles without fatigue, felt that he could not longer think of trespassing upon the kind hospitality of his friends at Monmouth Hall.

He therefore proposed to return to Laurel Park and resume his duties. Clara and Frank had both been very anxious for this, though they would not press him to enter upon his labors until he was fully able to sustain himself. Dr. Sheridine betrayed no anxiety to urge his return prematurely, and more than once stated to him that his salary should go on precisely as if he had been pursuing his occupation of instructing Frank and Clara.

"So this morning you have really decided to leave us, Mr. Winder," said General Leffingwell, as his carriage came round from the coach house to the door.

"I can have no sufficient excuse for remaining longer, sir," he answered, "although I relinquish with regret the society that I have so long enjoyed beneath your hospitable roof. I am unable, General, to return you any suitable thanks for your kindness and attention."

"Do not think of it, my young friend, unless you wish to offend me and Rosa both. We are the debtors! you will take with you my esteem and friendship. When you get to Laurel Park do not forget us. Monmouth Hall shall always be a home to you."

"You are very kind indeed, sir."

"Kind! not a bit. Well, Rosa," he said, as his daughter entered the room, "it seems Mr. Winder will go."

"Yes, sir; but he promises to see us often."

"I am afraid you have not urged him to stay."

"I have said all I could say, dear father. Mr. Winder feels that he is sufficiently recovered to resume his duties, and, much as I shall regret his departure, I should be the last person to wish him to deviate from a course which he believes it is proper for him to take."

"You answer like yourself, Rosa, always well. Do you ride over with him in the carriage?"

"Yes, sir. You accompany us."

"Of course, my child. I shall see my friend and your preserver safely beneath Dr. Sheridine's roof before I leave him. Besides, I am never going to suffer you, in coach or in the saddle, to ride out without proper escort. I take my pistols with me in the carriage, and George and Thomas will ride armed behind. The same motives which led those unknown men to attack you, may still exist; and they may resolve to make another attempt. I would give a thousand dollars to know who they are."

"The carriage is at the door, General," said the footman.

"Yes, we are going out. Come, Mr. Winder, lean on Rosa's arm, not offer her yours. You are not strong enough yet to play the cavalier."

Charles, who was still pale, smiled as he placed his arm in that of the maiden. His countenance was now far more interesting with the large, expressive eyes and softened expression which illness gives. They entered the carriage and drove rapidly through the avenue into the highway, and so on along the river road, which, after winding three and a half miles by the river shore, through charming scenery, entered the forest which adjoined the manor of Laurel Park.

"You have a fine healthy glow, Mr. Winder," said the general. "This fine air is bracing. It has just enough frost in it to make it agreeable."

"It is invigorating, sir! You also have a brilliant color, Miss Leffingwell," he added fixing upon her beautiful face the intense admiring gaze of a lover, and feeling as he gazed, the full power of her beauty upon his soul.

His remark heightened the rich hue of her cheeks, and their eyes met with one of those expressions of mutual sympathy, thrilling, electric looks that leap from heart to heart, as lightning from cloud to cloud. He sought her hand and pressed it in his own. They were at the instant just turning into the gate-way at Laurel Park, and he was

reflecting that in a few moments they would part; that the sweet life of the favored convalescent he had so many days passed would in a few brief seconds terminate. The same thoughts were passing through her own mind, and she became sad; for she had given her whole heart to her noble preserver, and could not feel happy any where but in his presence. His intellectual superiority, his elevated sentiments, his pure character, his generous spirit and amiable temper, added to his positive courage, an attribute all women admire and truly appreciate, had won not only her heart but her esteem. He was the beau ideal of her soul, the embodiment of all that her imagination had conceived of manly worth and manly greatness.

As he bent forward to take her hand there was a flash and report of a pistol from the road side—the horses sprung forward at a terrified bound, and the coachman with difficulty turned them into the gate way of the avenue up which they dashed at frightened speed which he, alarmed by the firing and the sight of a man in the thicket whence the flash came, increased by lashing them with his whip. General Leffingwell looked first at his daughter and then at Charles, to see if either were hit; and then shouted back to his two out-riders to turn back in pursuit.

"We have been fired upon without doubt, the discharge was so near, but thank Heaven we are none of us hurt!" said the General.

"I am quite confident I heard the humming of a bullet," said Charles in a quiet manner.

"Let us examine the carriage," cried the General. "It may have struck it."

The carriage was open all around with a high front and back. Charles was seated on the back seat with the General, Clara having chosen the front in preference where she sat alone. The velvet lining of the back where she sat was first examined as her father tremblingly feared she had been the object of assault. Nothing was visible like the impression of a ball.

"Bend forward, Mr. Winder, let us look at the back of the phaeton, though to strike it a ball must have passed through us."

Charles leant forward, when both the father and daughter uttered an exclamation of surprise and horror. The velvet was rent for a finger's length behind him and a bullet was hanging loosely in the exposed padding of hair.

"There is no question now," said General Leffingwell as he took the ball which dropped down upon the seat as they discovered it. "You have made a narrow escape. Did you not bend forward just at the discharge?"

"I did, sir," he answered, blushing and looking at Rosabel with a conscious glance; for he knew that it was when he had leaned forward to take her hand that the ball had passed over him! The consciousness of the imminent danger paled each cheek, though Charles was the calmest. He was not insensible to the narrowness of his escape, nor was he wanting in a profound sense of gratitude for his protection and safety; but in all situations he was habitually cool and self-possessed.

"You are too much alarmed, dearest Rosabel!" he said as she buried her face in her hands. "The danger is over."

"The villains shall swing for it!" cried General Leffingwell, as the phaeton drove up at the door. My two servants will give an account of them, for they were right after them."

"What is the matter? Who do you mean, General?" inquired Dr. Sheridine, for the carriage stopped at the door while the General was speaking; his last words in fact being addressed to the doctor.

"Doctor! The woods are full of assassins and robbers. We have been shot at within fifty yards of your gate-way! Look at this bullet! See this rent in the lining of the carriage! It is not five minutes ago."

"You confound me, General," exclaimed the doctor with looks of amazement.

"Well I may. The shot was aimed without doubt at my daughter, or else at Mr. Winder for rescuing her; for if he had not chanced to stoop forward to speak to Rosa at the

moment, he would have had it through his head. Yes, sir."

"Can it be possible! It is a very extraordinary circumstance. Do you think it can be the same persons who attacked you, Miss Rosa?"

"Indeed, sir, I did not see the persons who fired, nor the faces of those who seized my horse five weeks ago."

"It is very strange. Will you alight, General?"

"No. I shall leave Mr. Winder and Rosa and ride back and see what my men have discovered. Mark! hear that! One—two—discharges! There is hot work! Spring out Rosa! Mr. Winder be so kind as to let Dr. Sheridine help you out! This is no time for ceremony."

"I will ride with you, General!"

"No you must not, sir! You have been in too much danger already for one young man!"

"No, Charles, remain here. I shall stay," said Rosabel earnestly.

Charles left the carriage without another word, and the next instant it was dashing down the road at a rapid rate, General Leffingwell standing up erect in it, a pistol in his grasp, his white locks waving in the wind created by the phaeton's rapid motion!

No one of the party entered the house. They stood silent upon the steps, looking after the carriage and listening for the least sound with the most painful anxiety.

"The servants must have met them," said Charles. "There is no other way of accounting for the firing."

"No doubt. We shall soon learn," responded Dr. Sheridine. "Mr. Winder, I welcome you back, sir. I am glad you are looking so well again. It would have been a sad affair if you had been hit! It is a strange circumstance. Most extraordinary proceedings altogether. Frank, you dog, where are you galloping with that gun! Clara what are you riding off for! There they go—two scampadoes to be shot or get their necks broke. They have heard the news and are in for the sport neck or nothing. I am glad you are back, Mr. Winder, for I can do nothing with them. They were as docile as kittens when you had them."

Before he had done speaking the two subjects of his remarks were out of sight, each mounted without a saddle upon their favorite horse, and riding like huzzar officers at full speed.

In a few minutes afterwards the wheels of the phaeton were heard approaching at a rate so rapid that Rosa expressed her fears that something serious had occurred. It thundered up to the house and as it stopped, the footman George was discovered held in the arms of the General with a freshly bleeding wound in his temples and apparently in a dying condition.

CHAPTER VI

WHERE IS SHE?

WHEN the wounded man had been lifted from the carriage and laid upon the settee on the piazza, Dr. Sheridine at the moment proceeded to examine his wound and to inquire of General Leffingwell what had caused it; for until he had seen his servant carefully conveyed to the lounge, the latter had replied to none of the numerous questions which were put to him by all the excited party.

"First tell me, Doctor," said the General with deep solicitude, "first tell me if he is fatally hurt."

"It is a gun-shot wound and a very severe one. It does not seem to have been high enough to touch a vital part," answered Dr. Sheridine, after briefly inspecting it. "I will however, have him borne at once into the hall, and get my instruments to probe it."

"I beg you will do so. After he is cared for I will explain what has happened."

Dr. Sheridine then called two of his servants to convey the settee with its burden into the house. Rosa remained

on the piazza with her father who walked up and down it for a few moments with a stern brow.

"Dear father, what has occurred? Who did you meet with?" she asked, as he paused and gazed both upon her and Charles with deep emotion.

"I will tell you, my child. After I had driven back whence we had come, and reached the turnpike, I saw George and my other servant some distance up the road struggling with a man whom they were evidently trying to capture. As I advanced, a fourth person rushed from the way-side, discharged a pistol at George, who immediately fell. He then attacked my other man Miller who fled toward me. The two men then bounded over the fence and disappeared in the wood. I did not pursue them, but stopping my carriage where George lay bleeding upon the ground, I took him up into it with Miller's assistance and Frank's, who just then came up.

"Frank then dashed on up the road with his pistol cocked in his hand, saying he knew an open path that would enable him to enter the forest and cut off the assassins. I drove back here to the house as rapidly as I could with the bleeding man and met that fly-away, Clara, in full cry of Frank. Before I could warn her she had passed me and was out of sight."

"It is very dangerous for her as well as Frank to go off alone in pursuit," said Charles with energy. "I must be permitted to take the carriage and ride after them."

"Not a step, young gentleman. You must stay here. There have been enough attempts on your life already, without your throwing yourself in the way of your foes. Besides you are an invalid."

"Yet some one should go after them!"

"I sent Miller back; and we met two or three of the doctor's men, armed with clubs and forks, whom I also encouraged to hasten on in pursuit. Frank and Clara will look out for themselves. They are both well mounted and the assassins are a-foot! But let us go into the doctor and hear his report of poor George's case!"

"The wound is not mortal," answered Dr. Sheridine to their anxious inquiries. "unless a fever should set in. The ball has not penetrated the lungs as I at first feared. It is lodged under the fourth rib which is broken. I shall be able to extract it shortly, when he will do well. But it was a very narrow escape! As soon as I get the lint and bandages ready I shall proceed to extract the ball and dress the wound! Miss Leffingwell you had best go into the drawing-room and remain, for it is not a very pleasant sight for a lady to witness!"

The wound was at length dressed and the patient being comfortable and most of the time buried in a deep sleep like a lethargy, the party retired to the piazza where they began to talk over the extraordinary affair which had just occurred.

It was the opinion of them all that the authors of it were the same persons who had made the former one a few weeks before; but of this there could be no other evidence than that which the circumstances gave origin to.

"There is no doubt," said Rosa Leffingwell, "that Mr. Winder's life is aimed at by very deadly enemies. It is probable that they are the same who assaulted me and who now have attempted to assassinate him out of revenge for rescuing me!"

"That is my opinion," answered the General. "There is no question but that you both have the same enemy, and that you are both equally in danger, though the shot was aimed for Mr. Charles' heart. If they had killed him, they would doubtless then have made a second attempt to carry you off. But they did not count upon an old soldier's arm. They would hardly have gotten you from me, my child."

"What measures ought to be taken to secure these assassins, father, and to protect our lives?" asked Miss Leffingwell.

"I know not. The country should turn out to a man and scour the woods. Every suspicious person should be arrested and made to give an account of himself. I shall

not rest till this whole affair is fully sifted to the bottom. It is a fine come to pass, Dr. Sheridine, that we cannot travel our roads without being shot at from behind every tree!"

"It is indeed, general! I don't know what to make of it! It is really becoming dangerous to drive a quarter of a mile from one's house! I shall be afraid to venture out of my grounds!"

"You have nothing to fear. It is Mr. Winder and my daughter! They seem to be the target for them villains' bullets," cried General Leffingwell with indignation. "But here comes two of your men!"

"What have you seen, men?" demanded Dr. Sheridine, going hastily to meet two of his farm servants who were returning, one with an axe in his hand the other armed with a formidable looking scythe.

"We ha'n't seen nobody, sir," answered the foremost of the two. "We went up the pike a mile but heard nothing nor seed nothing!"

"The pike was not the place to find robbers that shoot from behind hedges," answered General Leffingwell impatiently. "You should have gone into the woods!"

"Did you see anything of Frank or Clara?" asked Dr. Sheridine with anxiety.

"They passed us near the white birch and turned into the green road that leads up to the Hemlock hill through the oak forest!"

"They will then poke their foolish heads into danger if they fall in with the assassins. What could make them so mad. Haste to the stable, you cowardly fellows, mount the first horses that you see bare back and gallop after them. If you come back without them I shall discharge you! But, stay, here comes another man mounted!"

"It is Miller," cried Rosa and the General at the same moment.

The man came up at a round pace and his face flushed and excited.

"What news, Miller?" demanded his master.

"I have seen one of the robbers, sir," answered the man breathless.

"Where?"

"In the woods sir! I followed on as you bade me after young master Frank and his sister; but they out-rose me. I kept on by their horse's tracks which left their marks fresh, and turned into a path that led deep into the forest. I galloped on for half a mile when I saw a person running across the path of me.

"I knew him at once to be the man that I had been struggling with, and as I had the pistol you put into my hand I spurred after him. As I came to the spot where he had entered the bushes I dismounted and went in after him!"

"You acted with courage, Miller!" said his master.

"I was not, however, able to find him, the foliage was so dense, and firing off my pistol at a venture in the direction he had gone and returned to my horse, and after deliberating what to do concluded to return to you and endeavor to cut him off as he was evidently making for the river!"

"That is a good idea! Doubtless they came by the river and will try and escape that way," cried the General. "I will at once jump into my carriage and drive round by the bluff road, while you send men, Doctor, to the shore by the nearest path?"

"Did you see nothing of Frank—nothing of Clara?"

"No, sir. The grass had grown over the path through the woods so thick that I was not able to trace the hoof marks, and not knowing but they had turned aside I did not follow it farther. Besides I was anxious to have assistance to try and cut off the man before he could reach the river!"

"Here comes Frank!" cried Rosa.

All eyes were directed down the avenue along which came the youth at full speed. As he reached the door he threw himself from his horse and the first thing inquired for Clara.

"She has not come back," answered Dr. Sheridine. "Where did you leave her?"

"She got ahead of me at the foot of the hemlock hill and disappeared, for I reined up, thinking I heard some one in the woods.

"I dashed in after the sound and came full upon a man who was running for life. He had no hat on and his dress was torn. Seeing me he paused and seemed as if about to attack me. I fired my pistol at him and he ran and got away where the trees were thick before I could come up with him on horseback!"

"It was the same man I saw," cried Miller. "Had he red hair?"

"Yes!"

"He has had two bullets sent after him, then," answered Miller with exultation; "for I fired at the same man!"

"Then that was your pistol I heard," said Frank. "Well I lost him and so I gave up the chase, and turned back after Clara. I followed on the path as far as the brook and saw nothing of her. I hallooed till I was hoarse, and then, concluding that she had come home, I turned back and galloped this way hoping to overtake her!"

"She has not come," answered her father with alarm in his looks. "I fear my poor mad girl has got into danger."

"I will go after her at once," answered Frank, leaping the wood.

"You ride also, Miller!" cried General Leffingwell. "Let the robbers go for the present. I fear something has happened to the rash girl."

"Perhaps not, father. She may soon be back!" said Rosa.

"I hear the sound of hoofs," exclaimed Winder, who had risen with the determination also to take horse in the search of the beautiful maiden whose wild and adventurous spirit had placed her in such peril.

As the horse came in sight it was seen that it was Clara's and that it was without a rider. It came cantering swiftly toward the house and stopped before the door with a wild eye and trembling like a leaf.

"What has befallen my child?" cried Dr. Sheridine with strong feeling.

"Something has happened to her!" exclaimed General Leffingwell and Rosa in the same breath, with emotion.

"I will soon learn," cried Frank spurring away. General Leffingwell hastened to his phaeton and sprung into it. Charles had caught Miller's horse by the head and asked him to resign the saddle to him. Before Rosa could say a word he was galloping down the avenue.

"That young man is mad he will never come back alive!" cried her father.

While he was speaking he was driving furiously after him.

Dr. Sheridine instantly ordered his sulky, and as soon as possible followed them, his heart heavy with the most fearful forebodings of evil to his favorite child.

One after another returned to Laurel Park, each reporting want of success. Charles came in at last sad and dejected. He forgot his own weakness, and that his own life was in danger from a secret foe, in anxiety for his lovely young pupil.

It was a melancholy reunion of those so deeply interested in the fate of the missing maiden. Night closed upon them, casting a deeper darkness than that of nature upon their souls. Frank was almost wild with grief and despair. Dr. Sheridine was calm, but not less filled with anguish. Every bosom was sad. With their return, however, weary and worn, the search was not given up. The whole country was by this time aroused and hundreds of armed men all that night with torches were scouring the forests, both with the hope of securing the assassins as well as finding Clara Sheridine, whom every one of the country people know and loved for her benevolence, and admired for her daring spirit.

Morning dawned, but with it came no intelligence of the missing girl. The hoof-prints of her horse had been care-

fully traced by Charles and Frank, step by step, from the house backwards to a place in the forest where there seemed to have been a good deal of trampling upon the ground both of the horse's hoofs and of men's feet. Here the hoof-prints disappeared while those of the men or man were followed till they could no further be traced in the forest. Their direction, however, was towards the shore of the river, from which the trampled spot was distant about three quarters of a mile.

Day after day passed for a week, and yet nothing transpired to reveal the fate of the young girl. The excitement caused by her wonderful disappearance seemed almost to take the place of that produced by the attack upon General Leffingwell's carriage. At the expiration of the fourth day after her disappearance, Edgar Sheridine who had been written to by his father came up from New York. He also joined in the search and expressed the liveliest grief at her fate, while he uttered the severest imprecations against those who had been the authors of her wrong. He did not cease to search for her until there was no prospect that she should ever be discovered.

The idea that she might have been dashed from the cliff or fallen into some ravine, which had at one time prevailed, he at length seemed to assume as the true cause of her disappearance.

"There is no doubt," said he to Rosa Leffingwell and Charles, "that she had been thrown from the cliff by her horse, who probably, alarmed by the firing in the woods, became ungovernable. The river flows deep past it and it is my firm belief that the body of poor Clara is at the bottom of its dark wave!"

This idea at length prevailed and the waters of the Hudson for a mile below were carefully dragged; but the result gave no floating corpse to the sight of those who searched; but this idea still prevailed, and the public mind soon gave its chief attention to the discussion of the attack and assassination; for poor George died on the evening of the ninth day after receiving his wound, and thus had murder placed its seal upon the bold outrage that had been perpetrated.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVALS.

It was on the afternoon of the eleventh day after the disappearance of Clara, that Rosa Leffingwell was seated with her father in the library at "Monmouth." They had been for some time talking together of the mournful and strange events which had passed, and both were now silently reflecting upon them.

The absence of Clara had deeply affected Rosa who was much attached to her; for under all her hoyden wildness, she discovered the elements of a noble character, frank, kind, and generous. She was also anxious for the safety of Charles who had sent her a note an hour before that he should call and take tea with her that afternoon if she should be at home.

She would have obeyed the first impulse of her fears by sending the servant back forbidding him to leave Laurel Park, but her father, to whom she named her intention, persuaded her from it.

"There is no use in Mr. Winder's making himself a prisoner, lest he should be again shot at."

"He is well enough now to ride out; and let him come. I shall be glad to see him. He would scarcely heed your request not to venture, for he is too brave a man to keep a house for fear of his life!"

"I wish I knew who are our enemies!" sighed Rosa. "I do not think of myself so much as of Charles' danger. Now that you have given your consent, my dear father, to our engagement, I need not conceal from you the interest I feel in his safety. It is like that I should entertain were he my husband. I tremble lest he should again be brought home, either wounded or slain!"

"Dismiss those fears, dear Rosa.—There is little fear that the rogues will venture to make their appearance here, now the country is in such an excited state. You know that every strange man is arrested who is not known as a good man, and made to give an account of himself and his business!"

"Yes, sir, but it is so easy for persons in boats to land under the bluff in the night, and secrete themselves in the ravines waiting through the day till their victim shall pass, or else boldly seek him out, under cover of the darkness. There is no doubt that they escaped that way by means of a boat."

"But little question of it, my child!"

"Poor Clara! What fearful fate can have overtaken her. There is the sound of horses' feet! How the least thing makes my heart rob! I am as nervous as a child!"

As she spoke she went to the window, but it was only the hostler leading two horses to the meadow. While she was looking, a motion among the distant trees of the avenue drew her eager attention. She watched it a moment until the outline of a horse and rider became developed.

"It is Charles, father," she cried springing to the door, and hastening up to the portico. "He has reached us safely!"

"He will come no sooner nor no safer by your running to meet him, girl!" cried the General as he followed her to the door.

"There are two, sir. One of them is Edgar Sheridine," she added in a tone of disappointment. "Why should he intrude here!"

"He doubtless comes to pay his respects, Rosa. I know you don't like him, but you must treat him civilly. Besides he comes with Mr. Winder as his friend, and you must make no distinction between them. I have been wondering why he has not been over here before, since he has been up from the city nearly a week!"

Rosa had drawn back within the door when she saw Edgar Sheridine was riding a little ways behind Charles; but the next moment as if disdaining to conceal her regard for our hero before the man she preferred him to, she advanced upon the portico and awaited their approach. Although they had entered the avenue one in advance of the other, they came up to the door abreast, Charles highest the steps.

"Good evening, Rosa," said Charles, his eyes beaming with happiness and love as he bent over his saddle towards her.

"I am so glad you have arrived without accident," she said in a tremulous tone.

"You were very imprudent to come unattended," she added in a low tone.—Then looking up she bowed to Sheridine who had bidden her "a good evening" in a very cordial tone, as if nothing to mar their acquaintance had ever passed between them.

"I have little fear of any one while I am mounted," said Charles; "besides I had Mr. Sheridine's company."

"Yes, Miss Rosa, hearing Mr. Winder say he was about to ride over to Monmouth, and knowing the perils that have hitherto attended him, I offered my escort; especially as I have been wanting to call and pay my respects to you?"

"We are glad to see you, sir," answered the general. "and have expected you before this. Nothing from poor little Clara yet, I dare say," he added in a tone of much emotion as Sheridine ascended the steps of the portico and shook his hand.

"No, nothing sir! It is a sad, very sad affair. I would give all I ever expected to be worth to know her fate!"

"I would be willing to sacrifice my hand to ascertain it," responded the general warily. "But walk in, gentlemen. Mr. Winder you will need some refreshment after your ride. Rosa, dear, have the wine set out on the side board!"

Miss Leffingwell performed the hospitable duty, and then sat down near Charles, with whom she was soon engaged in conversation, touching first his health, then the strange events which had cast such a cloud over their

minds. Sheridine made no effort to enter into conversation with her.

He talked with the General upon the disappearance of Clara; for this was all they could talk about while such an uncertainty hung over her.

Sheridine's manner, though at first bold and presuming, was now embarrassed, the coolness of Miss Leffingwell having no doubt touched him keenly. He watched both her and Charles as they talked together on the further side of the room with looks of suspicion and jealousy. At times he seemed so lost in regarding them with a pale cheek and evil eye that he scarcely heeded what General Leffingwell said to him, who more than once had to repeat his words to call his attention.

"It is my opinion the men were the same on both occasions," repeated General Leffingwell. "What do you think, Mr. Sheridine?"

The young man started and collecting his thoughts replied with hesitation:

"Yes, it is likely, very likely."

"On both occasions there were two men. At both times they were masked; and the attacks were made near the same place. The men, too, were about the same size and dressed in nearly similar costume, one a cloak and fur cap slouched over his mask; the other in a seaman's pilot coat with a low-crowned glazed hat."

"They were very cautious to prevent discovery!" remarked Sheridine, listening more to catch the words of the party in the bay-window than those of the General.

"Yes. I hardly know what to make of their motives. They first attacked Rosa, and it was done in a very strange manner if they were merely highwaymen. My opinion is that the scoundrels intended to have carried her off. They would have done it but for the bravery of Mr. Winder. If he had been at hand when Clara disappeared, she would have been rescued, I'll be sworn."

"Do you suppose she was carried off?" asked Sheridine coloring and speaking abruptly and so loud as to draw the eyes both of Charles and Rosa towards them.

"I have no doubt of it, sir. I know that you are of the opinion that she was drowned, poor girl! But it has always been my opinion that she fell in with these men and was taken off by them to their boats."

"You have no proof that they escaped in boats, sir," answered Sheridine; "and then again it is not probable that they would delay to take captive a wild young girl of sixteen when they had as much as they could do to care for their own safety."

"It was near night and they could have got off with her as well as with themselves. This is Rosa's opinion, too, and I have great confidence in her opinion!"

"Do you speak to me, sir," asked Miss Leffingwell coming forward.

"No, I merely spoke your name. I was saying to Mr. Sheridine that it was your opinion and mine too that poor Clara was taken off by the men who fired upon Charles."

"Yes, sir. I cannot in any other way account for her sudden disappearance."

"The river under the bluff near which she was last seen would account for it," answered Sheridine haughtily.

"On the bluff where she was last seen," repeated Charles with surprise. "Who saw her upon the bluff. We could only trace her horse's hoofs to within a half a mile of it, near the base of the Evergreen Hill."

"I don't know that it was exactly on the bluff. I thought some one said she was traced to the bluff," he answered with a degree of confusion, so like that of a man who is detected in a falsehood that not only Charles and Rosa noticed it, but it attracted the attention even of the old gentleman.

It, however, occasioned no remark; though the General could not but wonder within himself how it was that a man should look so confused merely from having misunderstood a fact.

"But this is an unpleasant subject to me," added Sheri-

dine with an air of grief. "I can hardly bear to speak of my sister. I mourn her already as one dead. Do you ride, Mr. Winder?" he added rising.

"No. I think I shall remain to tea," answered Charles.

"And so will you, Mr. Sheridine," said the General.

"I fear I shall intrude by my presence," he added with an air of cold derision slightly glancing towards Miss Leffingwell. "The lady does not second the invitation, General," and he laughed as if he had spoken playfully what was coined in the very mint of hatred.

"I should be very happy to have Mr. Sheridine remain," said Rosa, as civilly as she could; for she liked her guest but little, and would rather he had at once mounted his horse and galloped away.

"You came with Mr. Winder and you must return with him. He will need your escort, sir, as it will be near night when he goes back home."

"If Mr. Winder is so courageous a cavalier as to rescue ladies in peril from highwaymen, he will scarce thank me for my company!"

With this answer he bowed to all three and walked out to his horse. General Leffingwell followed him with a look of surprise plainly apparent on his face, shook hands with him and watched him gallop away. He at length re-entered his mansion.

"I don't know what to make of that young Sheridine. He seems a riddle to me," he said, addressing Charles and his daughter.

"I am glad he has departed," answered Rosa. "His presence seemed as if a cloud had rested upon the roof. With his departure comes social sunshine again."

"He seems very unsocial of late. I fear, Rosa, you have offended him by refusing him your hand, eh, girl?"

"I am not accountable for any of Mr. Sheridine's humors, sir. I trust he will not very soon repeat his call!"

"And I can say so, too, unless he brings more civility with him," answered the General; "but I dare say he feels badly about his sister. It has doubtless given a darker tinge to his temperament of late. How has he been, Mr. Winder, since his return?"

"I have seen but very little of him, he having been much away endeavoring to obtain intelligence of his sister. He has been very polite to me, unusually so; for before he went to New York he treated me haughtily. He has seemed now to seek my society and to conciliate me. His offer to escort me this afternoon is in keeping with all his bearing toward me!"

"This is very singular!" said Miss Leffingwell thoughtfully.

"What is very singular, child?"

"That Mr. Sheridine's conduct toward Mr. Winder should change so suddenly. He is indeed a riddle, sir. But I hope you will not think me uncharitable, Charles, when I caution you against too close an intimacy with him. I know his character, and that he is deceitful. If he seeks to gain your confidence now after his former haughty bearing toward you, be assured that it is from no good to you. He has beneath it all some hidden design. But we will not speak of him. The short hour you stay with us is too precious to be consumed in conversation upon one whose presence is so gladly dispensed with!"

"You speak wisely, Rosa," said the General.

"I have seen nothing in Mr. Sheridine of late but what has pleased me, except, indeed, the peculiarity of manner I noticed just now, and the seeming slur he cast upon my 'chivalrous courage,' as he phrased it, in the service I did you, Rosa! He has seemed to feel his sister's loss in a becoming manner, and has evinced the most affectionate zeal to discover her. He has also offered his services towards making a discovery of the persons who shot at me. Indeed, now that I recall his conduct, he has been very kind and obliging."

"I hope it is well meant. But I know the man! I beg you to watch him and trust him not, or you will regret it, Charles," said Miss Leffingwell firmly.

"You are prejudiced, daughter."

"It is experience and interest, that speak in me, dear Clara! I would rather he would show himself an open enemy to Mr. Winder than wear thus the outside of friendship. He has reason to feel unkindly towards one who has, I speak plainly, perhaps as a maiden should not, been a successful suitor where he has been rejected! But let the subject drop."

The conversation now turned to other subjects, and two hours passed pleasantly. After tea General Lessingwell ordered Charles' horse early that he might not be out after night; and when our hero went to mount him, after a lover's tender parting with Rosa, he smiled at seeing four stout men-servants armed with guns and pistols drawn up in array behind the animal for an escort.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT WAS UNDER THE MASK.

WE now return to the beautiful Clara Sheridine whose fate has been so long left in mystery, and whose absence had thrown such a shade of sadness upon the hearts of those who had loved her.

It will be remembered she had obeyed the mad impulse of her adventurous spirit, and, together with her younger brother, Frank, had joined in pursuit of the persons who had fired into General Lessingwell's carriage.

After Frank had reined up in the forest to watch the moving foliage, which he thought might indicate the passage of some person through the wood, she passed him, saying that it could be only a deer, that the robbers must have taken the main path direct to the river, which, she added, was their only mode of escaping from the forest.

With these words the fearless girl rode on, her rich brown hair floating in the breeze, her figure erect and animated, her features flushed with indignant excitement; for she had started in pursuit both from indignation at the act which had been perpetrated, as well as from the promptings of her adventurous temper. She had proceeded about a quarter of a mile beyond the place where she had left Frank listening and watching the agitated foliage, which proved to be set in motion by one of the men gliding through it, when she came to two paths which branched off at a large scyamore tree. The one at the left led to the river following the windings of a ravine. It was perfectly familiar to her and without hesitation she took it, wholly heedless of the consequences that might follow should she encounter in that wild spot either of the men who had begun to fill the country with alarm. She had borrowed, or rather taken from him, in spite of his remonstrances, one of the pistols which Frank had taken, and had it now in her left hand as she urged her horse forward with her right.

She had fired pistols often, and was, by no means, an inferior shot; she therefore felt great confidence, in her weapon. Her confidence in herself never yet failed her—that confidence, we mean, which implies self reliance and courage. So she rode on alone and at full speed through the forest path, until she came to an open space or meadow by the side of which the way led. As she reached it she saw a man just disappearing behind a spur of rocks that projected from the opposite extremity.

She had no sooner discovered him than she gave the whip to her pony and raced after him shouting for him to stay. He paused, and regarded her from the side of the rock for an instant, and then was lost to sight. The next moment she had passed the spot, and at the same instant his hand was upon the bridle of her horse, and his pistol levelled at her heart.

"Young girl, go back, or you will rue it!" he said, in a hoarse voice.

"I shall not go back, sir! Let go my horse or I will shoot you."

"You are mad! go back home, girl! Delay, and I shall take your life!"

She replied by raising her pistol and discharging it in his face, which was covered with a steel mask, from beneath which his voice had come, hoarse and deeply. The ball glanced from the polished surface along the side of his head, cut the fastenings of the mask so that it dropped from his face, exposing the features of her brother, Edgar Sheridine!

She uttered a cry of mingled surprise and terror.

"Clara, you have sealed your own fate by this act," he cried, fiercely; and he grasped her by the arm, and rudely dragged her from the saddle.

"Brother, brother, sake do not murder me!" she cried, half in fear half in anger at this treatment, as she gained her feet and confronted him.

"I hardly know whether I shall murder you or not! You have exposed me! You know who it is that has played the highwayman.

"Swear to me that you will never make known the knowledge you have obtained, and I spare your life, otherwise you die!"

"I shall bind myself by no such oath, Edgar Sheridine, for brother never more can I bring my lips to call you!"

"You dare not refuse to take the oath!" he cried, fiercely grasping her by the shoulder. "You know that it will be death to refuse to take it!"

"I do not fear you, though I know that I ought to fear any and every evil from the hand of one who has proved himself so accomplished a villain. Why have you sought the life of Rosa, and of Mr. Winder?"

"I did not seek her life. I love her to madness. I have loved her for three years past with all my soul! But this Winder came and installed a passion into her heart against me!"

"Did you mean to carry off Miss Lessingwell?" demanded Clara with surprise and contempt.

"Yes. That was my intention. I swore that she should never wed the man for whose love she had cast me aside.—So I laid a plan to entrap her in her forest ride. You know the result. But for Winder she would now have been mine. But I have not yet given her up.

"Had I succeeded then I should have borne her to a barge which I had in waiting, in a creek under the river bank, and taken her—it is no matter to you where. I have since then sought Winder's life, and I will yet have it. I failed just now; but had he fallen, I should have had Rosa Lessingwell in my arms, bearing her to the river-side."

"Oh! brother—nay you are no longer my brother! What a monster of wickedness have you become!"

"Mad girl! You are bringing your own ruin upon your head! Do you not fear that I shall keep my threat and kill you?"

"Yes, Edgar," she answered fearlessly, "I have not the least doubt but that you are capable of doing what you say! I do not fear to die! It is but to exchange the earth for the blue skies that bend over us!"

"Draw back or make any attempt to give the alarm and I swear by Him who made us that you shall die. I am not so easy as you suppose. I do not wish to take your life; but it shall be sacrificed, if need be, to secure my own safety. Will you come with me or shall I carry you?"

"I will go by your side, if you will release my arm," she answered.

At length they came to the bottom of the defile and the river, the bright board river, dotted with vessels, appeared in full sight of them. At the mouth of the defile the trees grew thickly together nearly concealing it from the view of voyagers going up and down. Beneath one of these trees within stone's throw of the water he stopped and looked carefully about him. He listened for a few moments as if expecting to hear or see some one approaching.

When suddenly a man appeared in the path before her.

He was running heavily like one fatigued, but as she came nearer to him she saw that he was wounded and was weak from loss of blood.

"Who the deuce is the little beauty, Ned?" asked the man coarsely.

"That is none of your business. She has discovered who I am and refuses to say she won't tell the country if I let her go!"

Come let us get the boat and push off down the river!"

"I am confoundly hurt."

"We have no time to look at wounds now! We must take to the water at once," responded Sheridine impatiently. "You must help what you can with the boat!" Thus speaking he approached the pirogue.

CHAPTER IX

THE FLYING CLOUD.

THE sun had already set, and the shades of twilight were rapidly falling upon land and river as the pirogue moved out of its covert in the inlet of the ravine and took the open channel. At the stern sat Sheridine with a paddle steering, his arm around the waist of his now passive and silent captive. Spurry seated upon the centre thwart pulled the two oars, though laboriously and not without giving utterance to an occasional curse at the pain his wound gave him.

The boat continued its way along the dark shores for about a mile, borne shore-ward by the current rather than by the oars of the rower, who at length ceased his exertions.

"Why do you stop, man?" cried Sheridine impatiently.

"I am too badly hurt to do any thing more."

"Then I will take your place," answered Sheridine, rising.

"And I will take yours," responded Spurry with a laugh that made Clara shrink with horror.

"Spurry, this young woman is my sister."

"Ah, well that alters the case," answered the man in a voice the tone of which Sheridine did not like. "What are you going to do with her?"

The pirogue kept on mile after mile. Not a word was interchanged between Sheridine and his prisoner. He silently rowed on, occasionally putting a question to his companion, Spurry, touching the distance they had come and had yet to go.

"I am willing, now you have taken your turn, though I shall pull my own stroke," answered the man, taking the place which Sheridine had vacated to go aft. This man was about the middle height, with a short neck and square shoulders. His complexion was florid, and his hair a fiery red. He wore it in long, bushy ringlets, as if proud of its saffron hue. His countenance was by no means vulgar, the expression being decidedly intellectual. He looked a man who had been used to refinement at some period of his life, but who had now fallen from his position, through vice and intemperance. His features were, doubtless, once handsome, and his hazel eye still retained beauty of form and color. His age was about thirty. His costume was that of a seaman. Over his face he had worn a mask when he came down the ravine, but had removed it after getting into the boat.

"Clara," said Sheridine, addressing his sister in an undertone, after he had taken his seat by her side, "I do not wish to injure you, or to make you unhappy."

"The only two enemies I have in the world are Rosa Leffingwell and Winder. Her I hate because I love her! This may seem a contradiction in words to you. But my love for her is the secret of my revenge. Winder I hate because she loves him, and also for crossing me in my purposes. Against you I bear no malice. I am willing to forgive what is past. I admire your firmness and courage. You have evinced both sufficiently, and now you gain nothing by continuing in this temper. You are the only person in the world who knows that I am not what I pass for in society. The secret you alone hold that I am the person who has perpetrated the acts which twice have set the country we live in in an uproar. My father, you, my friends, even Miss Leffingwell, have known me only as an

exclusive young man, affecting the best society, and something given to spending money. To you, now, I will entrust more. You know that I have, in the last three years, lived much at New York at the hotels. There I contracted a habit of gaming, and lost large sums of money.

"One night I lost two thousand and six hundred dollars to a stranger—a foreign naval officer as I supposed. I could not afford to part with a dollar of it, for I was largely indebted in town, and much of the money I had borrowed!

"Maddened by my loss, I accused the officer of cheating. He struck me with the flat of his sword. I borrowed a sword and bade him follow me to the Battery, near which was the gaming saloon.

"Upon reaching a remote part of it, close by the water-side, where he had led the way, I drew upon him. After the third pass I was disarmed. The next moment I found myself seized by three or four men and borne into a boat. The stranger followed and gave orders to pull from the shore. There were six rowers. It was some minutes before I recovered sufficiently from my surprise and confusion at the suddenness of the event to realize that I was being borne rapidly out in the harbor.

"What means this outrage?" I demanded.

"I mean, my dear sir, to give you a little sea-air. It will cool your hot blood. Besides, it will be a pleasure to me to have a companion in my vessel."

"I remonstrated, and began to show resistance, when he quietly cocked a pistol at my ear, and bade me be quiet if I loved life. In about twenty minutes we came along side of a small but beautifully modelled schooner of about seventy tons. We got on board, and I was ushered into a very handsome cabin. It bore an air of Oriental luxury.

"Now, sir, said the officer, after I had recovered a little from my surprise, and had fixed upon him a look of inquiry as to the meaning of his conduct, 'now, my dear sir, I will give you an opportunity of winning back all the money I have won of you to-night. It is for that I have brought you on board my vessel.'

"What is the character of your vessel?" I asked.

"She was built for Mexico by the order of President Santa Anna; but not being paid for, was sold. I became her purchaser, last week. It is my intention to take a short voyage to the Havana to try her sailing qualities. She is named 'The Flying Cloud!' and I wish to see if she rightly merits her presuming title. Now if you win back your money I will set you on shore to-morrow. If you lose you shall be my companion on the voyage!"

"This was spoken in a bold free way. I was struck with the proposition, and took a liking at once to the man, though he was so lately my antagonist.

"How can I play," I answered as I saw him produce cards and lay them upon a marble table in the centre of the cabin; "I have not a dollar to lay the first stake."

"I will loan you on your note of hand a thousand dollars!" said he, carelessly.

"Done," I answered.

"We played, and the dawn found us over the fascinating, maddening game. I rose a loser ten thousand dollars. For this sum he held my notes of hand, ten separate ones for one thousand dollars each, payable on demand. I had no other alternative than to submit to his pleasure. It was then I took the voyage to the south, in which I was four months gone, writing to my father that business had called me away, and begging him to look after my debts!"

"Who was this man?" asked Clara, for the moment interested.

"He proved to have been an officer in the Brazilian service, where he had enriched himself. He was an American by birth, and about thirty years of age, and one of the finest looking men I ever saw. The result showed that he had bought this vessel for pleasure and piracy."

"Piracy?"

"Yes. In a word the man had a taste for buccaneering. While I was with him, however, he made no captures, and after a really pleasant cruise he returned to New York, gave me back my notes, and told me if I ever wanted a

friend in an emergency to call on him. After that I did not see him for some months, until a few weeks ago, three days after I had been both rejected and insulted by Miss Leffingwell. You forget your oars, Spurry. I want no listeners!" he said, angrily, as he saw the man paused in his task, as if to catch his words. He then resumed his narrative.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAP.

"AFTER Rosa Leffingwell had rejected me I left directly for New York," continued Sheridine, taking up his narration, seeing that Clara listened to him with absorbed attention; "I went to the city burning with revenge against her. I loved her with all the powers of my being. She had been dearer to me than all besides that earth held. I idolized her. I worshipped the very ground she trod upon. I have knelt and imprinted kisses upon her foot prints. I—but I will not repeat my follies. She spurned my suit! She spurned it with bitter words! She told me she did not believe me an honorable man. I went to the city to seek out my friend the Brazilian. His name, I forgot to say, was Fordwell. He was then fortunately in the harbor with his vessel. I went on board of it. He received me with hearty friendship, for he had formed a strong attachment for me, as I had for him. I told him at length the history of my love and of my determination that I would yet possess the object of my affections.

"If I can never have her no one else shall," was my determined expression.

"What will you do, Sheridine?" he asked. "How can I help you?"

"I then told him that it was possible to get her into my power by stratagem. That she often rode miles on horseback unattended save by a servant. That I could lie in ambush for her and surprise and carry her on board his vessel if he would have her in waiting in the river off against Laurel Park or Monmouth."

In reply he told me that he had just resolved on an expedition to cut off one of the Packet ships which was about to sail carrying a very large amount of specie.

"I am here anchored ready to put to sea as soon as I learn she clears from the custom-house. Go with me in this expedition and on my return I will sail up the river for you provided there is not a hue and cry raised after me.

"The truth is," continued he, "I am now under Mexican colors and to these owe the impunity with which I am suffered to remain here. Were my true character known—that is, was it known that I sailed under *no* colors at all when on the blue sea, I should have to slip cable and run for it. As it is my secret is safe. I have not yet robbed any but Spanish ships, and Spain is too weak to look after a sea-robber, she has so many worse land robbers at home. The moment I touch a Yankee ship I shall be marked. I have therefore let them go untouched; but this packet ship must be looked after at all risks; for she has nearly a million of dollars in her! Will you go with me?"

"I answered him firmly in the negative, and told him that if he must go I should have to look to some other means for accomplishing my object.

"After Fordwell, having heard my determination, told me he had a man on board whom he could recommend to me as a faithful assistant. I need not name him he is already so near you. He told me he would readily do anything for money. He said he had once been a gentleman, but vice had leveled him to an adventurer of the most hardy character. I then detailed to Fordwell my whole plan, and left him, after listening to some suggestions which his greater experience dictated. The man Spurry, for a certain sum," continued Sheridine, "bound himself to my service. I neither told him my name nor that of the lady we were to surprise. He only knows me as Mr.

Edgar, which he sometimes impudently nick-names "Ned," for he is as impertinent as he is evil and useful. But I bear with him. By his ready aid I secured a boat and four men, who supposed they were only going to aid in an elopement, and being well paid by me, were ready to keep secret the expedition."

"It was the night preceding the day on which I encountered Miss Leffingwell by the mill that the boat reached the mouth of the creek on which the mill stands. I run the boat about a quarter of a mile up the creek, and there concealed it and the party with orders not to stir until they heard from me. Then taking Spurry with me, I proceeded to Laurel Park, which was three and a half miles distant. We reached it about midnight. I proceeded at once to my father's stables, saddled two of the horses, which we led to the outer gate, and then mounted them. We then rode to Monmouth, secreted ourselves in a wood, and watched the house from the summit of the Chestnut Hill, from dawn until we saw Miss Leffingwell ride from it with her footman.

"We had previously disguised ourselves with the additional precaution of wearing masks. We let them advance until they had been gone about a quarter of an hour, when I gave the signal to follow. On reaching the main-road, I saw by the tracks of their horses, that they had taken the road up the borders of the creek; and as we had seen that she had taken her fishing-rod with her, I concluded she would proceed to the lake above the mill, where I had often accompanied her in more favored days. I had hoped she might take the road down the stream, which would have brought her close upon my party. But determined at all hazards to take possession of her, I pushed on after her until I came in sight of them, when I reined in and gave my instructions to Spurry. They were, that when I should give the word and gallop ahead, towards her, he should take care of the footman, but by no means do him an injury; for I knew that any blood-spilling would rouse the country. I resolved to seize Miss Leffingwell's horse by the head, and put him to the gallop alongside of my own, and in this manner take her to the spot where the boat and her crew were secreted!

"But it matters not. I did not take her, thanks to that infernal Winder, whom I one day will be avenged upon. After I got away I reached my boat where I found Spurry already before me. Without a moment's delay we pulled out of the creek and quietly across the river which we reached before the alarm had been given. We then kept down to the city on the Western shore.

"I swore relentless vengeance towards Winder. I saw my father once in the city, and from him heard the whole affair and found with joy that no suspicion attached to me. I then determined to renew my efforts to secure, now, not only the possession of Miss Winder, but compass the death of the only man whom I consider stands between me and her affections! I resolved this time to go accompanied only by Spurry. We reached the place where you got into the boat just before dawn two mornings ago. I laid in wait at different points for Winder two days, before I saw him; for I had learned that he rode out daily in General Leffingwell's carriage. I did not expect to see Rosa with them, when at length they came in full view from my ambuscade.

But when I saw her I whispered to Spurry that if I killed Winder at the first fire I should seize the young lady, and that he must stop the horses. While I was speaking they came opposite; I fired! But just at the instant, Winder bent forward and I missed him. The horses terrified, dashed forward, encouraged by the coachman. A second time I saw myself defeated in the very act of consummating my dearly cherished vengeance. The servants who were sent back in pursuit rendered it necessary that we should look to ourselves, and calling on Spurry to follow I retreated through the forest. He had, however, with his usual hardihood, awaited the assault of the mounted men, when seeing him in danger of being taken prisoner by them, I hastened back to his rescue, and firing at one of the men

shot him and released my man. We then took to the woods again. Spurry did not follow me closely and was bewildered and finally fallen in with and wounded by Frank, I suppose it was from his description.

"Now, Clara, you know the whole of these affairs. You see I have been an injured man. Rosa Leffingwell has insulted me, and Charles Winder has supplanted me in her heart! Have I not reason to hate them both? Have I not cause for revenge? Does my crime look so dark to you that are still willing and ready to sacrifice me?"

"Shall I accept my life and liberty from your hand and go home and quietly look on while you accomplish their deaths. No, Edgar Sheridine! I will first lose my life. It is in your hands, take it, ere I purchase it at such a price."

"Spurry, I cannot let the girl live," he said, in a tone trembling with passion. "Let us cast her into the river."

"She can do no harm, Mr. Edgar," said the man, ceasing to row.

"She will betray us."

"I don't care, for my part, if she does. I haven't a character to lose. I can find some other country if this gets too warm!"

"But I have a character and name to lose, man."

"She shan't die just to save that from spoiling, you may be assured," responded Spurry firmly, and rising up in the boat as he spoke.

CHAPTER XI.

IN PERIL.

THE bold and unexpected attitude taken so suddenly by his hireling confounded Sheridine. His voice rang across the waters as he cried furiously,

"What! Do you dare to interfere. I will do as I please with her. I swear to you she shall not live to put foot on shore. She has defied me and has proven herself to be the greatest enemy I have on earth. It would delight her to be the agent of bringing me to the gallows! Take seat and oars again!"

"Not, while that young girl's life is in danger from your cowardly fears. Offer to lay hands upon her to throw her over-board and you follow her!"

"Do you menace me?" demanded Sheridine his voice trembling with passion; and drawing a pistol he levelled it at Spurry.

"You need not try to alarm me, Mr. Edgar. Your pistol I know is not loaded, so we are equal for mine are not!"

"But my dagger is always pointed," he cried springing towards him with a ferocious cry.

Clara shrunk upon her seat trembling but self-possessed. She felt that she had a friend in Spurry and her heart which had died within her at the immediate prospect of death in the dark river again revived with that hope and love of life which clings to us all to the last. She neither moved nor spoke, but sat petrified with surprise and awe at the fearful scene before her.

"Mr. Edgar, you had best think before you proceed too far," cried Spurry, retreating to the bows and raising his oar to defend himself. "I am as desperate a man when I am roused as you are! A struggle between us here in the little boat will only end in your death and mine too perhaps. You need not hold your dagger up in that style. Come within my reach and I grapple with you and we are overboard, and let the best man keep his head above water!"

"Who is the best man then let us prove," answered Sheridine, his rage wound up to frenzy at thus meeting resistance and mutiny where he had looked for co-operation. "Villain, I know well your hellish motives in wishing to spare this maiden's life. She has more reason to fear your assumed humanity, than the death which she deserves at my hands. I have no doubt you have, while rowing, been

planning how you should get rid of me that she may be in your power!"

"If you fear for your sister you should not have brought her into such company," answered Spurry, coolly. "But you mistake my motives. I have taken her part from pity and to prevent one of the most infernal murders that a man ever committed. None but a coward and a white-livered knave would sacrifice his sister's life to save his own already damned reputation!"

"That speech decides your fate!" cried Sheridine, springing upon him, bringing down his arm which held the dagger in the direction of his breast. Spurry parried the deadly aimed blow with his oar and then closed with him by hugging him in his arms with the strength of a giant.

"Now, Mr. Edgar, you are in my power!" he said, in a deep tone of triumph.

"And you in mine, fiend!" repeated Sheridine, as he shortened the dagger and endeavored to force the point into his back. To escape the blow Spurry lifted him bodily from his feet and sprang with him into the river. Both instantly disappeared. Clara shrieked at the fearful scene, and covered her eyes to avoid seeing the boiling whirlpool made in the dark waters with their descending forms.

They remained beneath the surface full a minute and then rose on the other side of the boat and full ten feet above it. They seemed to her to be locked in each other's embrace still.

"Release me," cried Sheridine, "and I will not harm my sister!"

"No, no! I have you at advantage now, and she is mine! I tell you that to please you! Know that if I get the better of you she becomes mine! Now do your best to save her!"

Again they went down, curses gurgling upon Sheridine's lips as they disappeared. Clara's first instinct and which humanity dictated, was to afford them instant aid. But she feared to offer it to her brother whom she dreaded more than she did Spurry; for she knew the safety of the former would be the seal for her own death by his hand. She would have tried to save the other by paddling the boat back toward the spot where they went down but his last words had alarmed her and made her tremble with horror. Her resolution was at once taken, with a prayer to Heaven for forgiveness if she did evil. She grasped the paddle and with a few strong strokes sent the pirogue thirty yards farther down the river beyond the place where they had sunk. She then stopped plying her oar and watched the surface of the water. At length one appeared above. She looked steadily but still only one was visible. The person seemed to be swimming toward the boat. She sent it still farther off and then listened and closely surveyed the river above her for the other. But one only was visible. One of them had therefore gone down to rise no more! Which was this? She dared not put the question to her own throbbing brain. Whichsoever it was her danger was equally great.

"Ho, Clara! the boat!" cried her brother's husky and labored voice.

"It is my brother! Powers direct me!" she cried clasping her hands. "Shall I save him—his hands reeking with the blood of a fellow-being! his heart filled with murder? Shall I save his life that he may the next moment, with no one to defend me, take my life? One is above and sees and knows all! I will let Him judge me! If my brother drowns, his death be on his own head! Shall he live to slay me, to ruin Rosa—to assassinate Mr. Winder? He has bought his present fate! He must abide it. I am clear of his blood before Heaven that with its myriads of starry eyes sees both me and him!"

"Paddle the boat this way, Clara!" cried Sheridine. "Will you let me drown?"

"I have no ears for you, sir! My safety forbids my assisting you. If you perish, perish, and may God have mercy on your soul!"

"Will you let me perish before your eyes! You mock

me and but jest! I swear that I will not injure you, if you will take me on board!"

"I will not trust myself in your hands. Providence has delivered me from your power and I shall not put myself in it again! The shore is not far distant, and if Heaven designs to spare you, you will reach it in safety. To me you appeal in vain for aid. Three lives hang upon your own if you live, and I shall not hasten three deaths by saving one wretched life like yours!"

With these spirited words, which were spoken with mingled feelings of anguish and decision, this extraordinary young girl took the oars, seeing that Sheridine was swimming toward her, cursing her at every stroke of his arms, and began to pull rapidly down the river. Her mind was filled with horror at the situation she was placed in; but she was governed by a stern course of duty, which only a remarkably resolute spirit would have fully carried out without wavering or weakness. She did not look, as she darted down the stream, in the direction of the swimmer, but closing her eyes, continued to row swiftly onward until long after the fierce shouts of the swimmer had died away in the distance.

Gradually her stern emotions became more tranquil, and when she reflected upon what she had done, both her heart and conscience acquitted her.

"It is dreadful to think that when I could have saved him I should have suffered him to drown," she said aloud, her voice saddened by painful feelings; "but had I saved him I should have done the same as thrown away my own life, for he would never have suffered me to live. I should also have to answer for whatever mischief he might do to Rosa and Mr. Winder. I should have saved a murderer that he might do other murders. No, I am acquitted of guilt in what I have done. It has torn my heart to do it, till it aches and bleeds. But it was a righteous act, and I know heaven will approve it. How could the victory have been decided in his favor, when Spurry was so much stronger, and had him in his fierce embrace? Now what shall I do? Whither shall I go? The city is not far below, but if I reach it, where shall I land in the darkness? It is safer for me to remain on the river until day dawns, when I can land at a secure spot and cast myself upon the protection of some family. I will, therefore, pull out into the middle of the river, then cease to row and let the boat remain until morning."

Thus resolving, the young girl bent once more to the oars and rowed far out into the middle of the broad Hudson, and then seated herself, partly reclining against the side of the pirogue, and gave herself up to the sad and painful thoughts which the terrible scenes of the past hour gave rise to.

Insensibly sleep overcame her, and her boat was borne slowly by the ebbing tide down the river, towards the open bosom of the Bay.

When Sheridine found that his resolute sister was really in earnest and far from jesting, his rage and terror found vent in oaths and cries for help.

He now felt that justice had come upon him. The fear of death, however, gave him energy to struggle, although he was greatly weakened by his fatal contest with Spurry. The second time they had gone down he had succeeded in releasing himself from his grasp by raising his feet and pressing them against his breast.

By this means he had full command of his dagger. But reckless of this, Spurry once grappled with him, fastening his hand upon his throat as they were rising towards the top of the water, and downward they descended together. But ere they had gone down many feet, Sheridine succeeded in burying his knife to the hilt in the heart of his antagonist. The grasp of the dead man's hand upon his throat relaxed, and the body sunk like a stone beneath him. Almost strangled by the water and pressure upon his windpipe, Sheridine with difficulty reached the surface of the water; and it was then a few moments before he could perfectly command his senses. He at length saw the pirogue and feebly called for it to approach. After Clara's

firm refusal, and when he saw her fairly moving away leaving him to the fate he so well merited, it would be impossible to portray his feelings of rage and horror. Gradually he beheld the pirogue retire farther and farther from his strained eyes, until it was no longer visible. Self-preservation now took place of every emotion, and being a good swimmer, he tried to swim on shore. But fatigued by his fierce struggle with Spurry, and having on thick clothing, his mind also filled with rage against his determined sister, he got along with difficulty, and more than once descended beneath the surface. At length, after efforts that were nearly superhuman, he reached the shore and cast himself upon the beach without further power to move.

Until the sun had been an hour risen he laid in the same spot almost without life or sense, when at length he was revived by the dashing of the water of the fast rising tide into his face. He opened his eyes with slowly returning consciousness, and started with horror at seeing, face to face with him, the corpse of the man he had murdered, which flung its wave-tossed arms over him at every motion of the waters.

He rose to his feet with a bound and a cry of mortal terror, his eyes fascinated and fixed by the wild glare of those of the horrible visage which had been lying face to face with his.

With terror unspeakable he fled from the spot and sought to conceal himself in the forest from the fearful spectacle.

At length he gained the main-road and not being but five miles from the city he walked towards it. He reached the suburbs a little before noon and then taking a hackney coach ordered the man to drive to his private-rooms; for in town Sheridine had sumptuously furnished apartments, which were now arranged with more than usual elegance for the possible reception of Rosa Leffingwell. He soon changed his dress and after dining he appeared in Broadway with all the outward garniture of a young man of fashion and wealth. He was, it is true, something pale, but this made him look more interesting, and caused many kind inquiries after his health from his friends.

Who that saw him passing, richly dressed and gaily conversing with some lovely female acquaintance, would have guessed what had been his previous day's occupations, or suspected his last night's deeds? How little do men know of each other as they meet and pass one another in the crowded streets of a metropolis. If men could read the hearts of each other and know from whence and from what deeds of guilt they have come forth into the bright sunshine, how would they avoid one another! But men's deeds are secret to the public eye, and each man goes forth to his fellow man wearing a mask.

The young man the next day received a letter from his father informing him of the sudden disappearance of Clara and also of the attack upon General Leffingwell's carriage, which had led indirectly to it. Sheridine, however, felt that he was too much indisposed to hasten home at once.

He delayed two or three days to recover his good looks and also to try and ascertain what had become of Clara, for he trembled lest she might live to condemn him. He rejoiced that Spurry, the chief witness and partner of his crimes, was no longer able to give evidence to the world against him: and if his sister had been lost on the river, as he hoped, he had nothing to fear. During the three days that he delayed he had been using every means, by cautious inquiries, to learn the fate of his sister, when at length, as he was questioning some boatmen upon the battery and describing the pirogue, Fordwell approached the stairs in a cutter rowed by four men.

The surprise and pleasure expressed by Sheridine at so unexpectedly seeing the Brazilian, whom he supposed to be at sea, was plainly manifest from the warm welcome he gave him.

"You are of all men the very person I most wish to see at this moment," said Sheridine. He then narrated to the Brazilian a very lame and garbled version of his attempt to carry off Rosa, in which the darkest details were omitted.

He also got a promise from the captain that he would aid him in another attempt.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAIDEN'S RESCUE

WE now once more turn our attention to Clara, whom we left asleep in the pirogue, which borne by the ebbing tide was slowly and steadily drifting down the harbor. The boat had passed Governor's island and the quarantine ground with its unconscious tenant, when a schooner coming in from sea passed close to it. The schooner was "The Flying Cloud!" Like the empress of the midnight wave, she moved with graceful motion through the shades of night, her beautiful proportions and faultless symmetry apparent even in the obscurity of night. She was under her mainsail, jib, and fore-topsail only.

"What object is that on the water?" cried Fordwell, who had been looking over the side watching the progress of his vessel into the harbor. "Bring me my glass, and helmsman, luff a couple of points! It looks like a boat adrift!"

The glass was brought to him, and after inspecting the object, he gave another order to the man at the helm to luff closer, while he ordered his men to stand by to cast a grapnel into the boat as they passed it.

The next moment they came close upon it, and Fordwell was just about to order his men to heave the grapnel into her bows, when he thought he discovered a person lying down in it.

"Hold! There is a person in it, either dead or asleep. Leap from the fore-chains into her there one of you with a rope to secure her!"

One of the men obeyed, and the boat was secured as it was drifting by, and swung alongside under the gangway.

"Who is it? Is it a woman?" demanded he of the man who had leaped into the boat.

"Yes, sir!"

Fordwell descended into the pirogue, and bent over the prostrate form of the sleeping Clara, who was buried in such profound repose that not even the presence of the man in the boat, nor the sound of their voices, aroused her.

"Hand the lantern here?" cried Fordwell. "She is a young and beautiful girl!" he exclaimed with surprise and admiration, as he cast the beams of the lantern upon her features.

The glare of light caused her to start and open her eyes. She looked from one to the other wildly, with the air of one trying to realize where she was.

"Don't be alarmed! You are safe here," said Fordwell in a kind tone. "We found you drifting out to sea in the boat, and have brought you alongside of my vessel. Will you get into it?"

"Yes, sir," answered Clara, still bewildered and shuddering.

"How came you to be in this situation?" asked Fordwell in the same gentle tone. "Has any one been lost overboard?"

"Oh, do not ask me now! I cannot tell. It all seems like a fearful dream.

"Let me assist you to get upon the schooner's deck. Now come with me to my cabin. It shall be sacred to your use!" he said as she stood upon the deck leaning upon the arm which he had offered to support her.

There was something so frank and kind in his voice and manner, that she felt confidence in him. She suffered him to conduct her into the beautiful cabin; and having led her to an ottoman he offered her a glass of wine.

"Do not refuse it! You are chilled and faint. Be persuaded to take it! I know that you have met with some terrible misfortune, and you need something to keep you up."

She drank the wine and then he was about to leave the

cabin, not wishing then to press any questions upon her, when she called him back.

"You were asleep when I discovered you."

"In what part of the river are we, sir?"

"The river?"

"The Hudson. Are we not in the Hudson?"

"We are in New York Bay, two leagues below the city."

Clara started with amazement.

"Then I must have slept several hours."

"And in a little while longer your frail boat would have been tossing on the waves of the ocean. Were you in the Hudson when you fell asleep?" asked Fordwell.

"Yes, sir. I was rowing to——"

Here she hesitated, and her face grew pale as she recalled the danger she had been in from her brother's fierce passions, and the scenes she had passed through with him and Spurry.

"You seem to have gone through some painful scenes!" said Fordwell, desirous of learning the cause of her drifting at night in the bay in an open boat.

"Yes, such as no one ever before passed through," she answered with thrilling pathos.

"Will you let me hear. I am your friend. I will serve you if you have been the victim of any wrong. Will you tell me all that has passed; for I begin to suspect that you have been the victim of some dark roguery."

"I will let you know all, then, sir. Your looks and kindness to me invite confidence. I would be glad to withhold the truth, for it involves a brother. But I will open to you freely the whole story; for I know not but that you may advise me what to do."

"If I can do anything to betriend you, you may depend upon my aid. Your appearance and singular situation has deeply interested my feelings. You may trust me as you would a brother."

"A brother! No, not as a brother. My brother has been my greatest enemy. But you shall learn, sir, all!"

Clara then began to make known to him her name and condition of her family, her place of residence, and the character of her brother.

Here the young girl proceeded to relate in detail all that occurred leading to her capture and the events in the boat. She repeated to him her brother's account of his motives and conduct, and also his future intentions respecting Miss Lessingwell and Charles Winder. She informed him of his renewed efforts to persuade her to keep secret what she had discovered, and her firm refusal. She then told him how he prepared to cast her from the boat into the river, and of Spurry's interposition. Then followed the account of the quarrel and struggle in the boat, the overboard plunge, locked in each other's embrace, and the horrible death of Spurry.

Then, in the most energetic and thrilling manner, she related the scene that followed, where she had the fearful struggle with herself between a desire to save her brother and her duty to suffer him to perish.

It would be impossible to describe the emotions with which Fordwell listened to her extraordinary narrative. Her eyes now flashed with indignation, now softened with the moisture of emotion. When she ended, he gazed upon her face for a few seconds in silence and amazement. That one so young—a maiden scarcely seventeen—should possess such a lofty and resolute character, he could scarcely realize. He grasped her hand impulsively between his own and cried,

"Miss Sheridine, from me you have gained a friend. From this hour you have only to command me and I will obey. I trust that your brother did not drown. I do believe that he has yet to live for a higher destiny—pardon me, I mean the gallows. I hope he swam ashore—as I see he must be a skilful swimmer. I hope he lives that he may be punished as his crimes deserve."

"I have no doubt that he perished. If he lives, it will be to carry out his revenge against Rosa and Mr. Winder."

"If he lives he shall have no such power. But I shall learn soon. I shall make every inquiry in the city. If he

is dead let him pass; for there is a judgment seat in another world for such as he. I never yet heard such villainy. Will you consent to remain on board until I learn positively his fate. It will be but a day or two. This cabin shall be solely yours, and I will only enter it but by your permission. I wish him to be kept ignorant of your safety, should he be alive. Will you remain?"

Clara answered in the affirmative; and in an hour afterwards the schooner came to anchor off the Battery.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MEXICAN CAPTAIN

FORDWELL had been forty-eight hours in port before he was so fortunate as to get any tidings as to the positive fate of Edgar Sheridine, whom he firmly believed must have reached the shore in safety, after he found that there was no hope of being taken into the boat. As Sheridine had changed his rooms, he was not able to find them, else he would have heard at once that he was in the city. But the evening before he met him on the Battery he had fallen in with a person who said that he had seen Sheridine in town that very day and spoken with him. This intelligence he conveyed at once to Clara on board the schooner; and the ensuing morning had landed with the determination to find him ere he returned on board, when he saw him, to his great joy, conversing with the boatmen.

Having the advantage of a previous knowledge of all the facts, it has been seen how he listened to a garbled account given him in the case by Sheridine, whom he now wished only to entrap; for he had conceived towards him the utmost contempt and hatred. For Fordwell was by no means a man of the same stamp with Sheridine. He was his superior in every point of character. He had distinguished himself by his bravery as a man, and his skill as a seaman, in the Brazilian navy, which he entered as an aspirant for adventure and fame. He was the son of a rich merchant, and in his nonage had been several voyages in his father's ships as supercargo. At his father's death he inherited his fortune, and in less than three years ran through with it by light living. Instead of wrecking himself by groveling intemperance he went to sea and on reaching Rio Janeiro left his ship and entered the Brazilian navy as a midshipman. He rapidly rose to command, and in the war against Buenos Ayres acquired both money and honor. He then resolved to return to the United States.

On his arrival in New York, he gave himself up to pleasure. But after a few weeks, getting wearied of this life, he determined once more to try the ocean. A Mexican schooner which had been ordered by the Mexican Government, but which had not been paid for, was advertised to be sold. He purchased her, manned her, and, after casting about in his mind some pleasant port to visit, he resolved to offer his services to the Mexican Consul to carry despatches to Vera Cruz. For this purpose he waited upon him. The offer was accepted, especially as Fordwell offered to sell the schooner to Mexico after his arrival out, if it chose to purchase it. It was when he was about to proceed on this expedition that he met with Sheridine in the gaming saloon, and subsequently fought with, and disarmed him on the Battery. It was wholly from the impulse of a whim that he conveyed him on board his vessel and compelled him to make the cruise with him. It was also from a similar eccentricity that he saw fit to represent himself to the unprincipled young man as a pirate, when piracy was farthest from his thoughts. He did so to sound his passenger, and was rewarded by ascertaining that he would feel little compunction at taking part in boarding any vessel.

At Vera Cruz the vessel was bought by the government, Fordwell was made her captain, a Mexican crew was shipped, and he was commissioned to cruise against the vessels of Spain. Several such captures were made while Sheri-

dine was on board; and he, not being aware of the commission, was made to believe that they were taken piratically. The schooner again visited New York with despatches to the Consul, ordering him to purchase two or three brigs of war for the service. It then sailed on a cruise after Spanish vessels. It was on a return from such a cruise that Sheridine applied to him to aid him in abducting Rosa Lefflingwell. Had Fordwell known the facts, he would have refused to take part in the affair; but Sheridine had represented that he only wished to elope with her and marry her in New York, and in other ways entirely misrepresenting the circumstances. Had he known as fully then as he did afterwards the character and intentions of Sheridine, as well as the high respectability and beauty of Miss Lefflingwell, he would never have given him any assistance in his nefarious schemes.

He did not, even then, yield but with reluctance, and only finally, gave him Spurry in order to get rid of an evil man whom he cared no longer to have on board his vessel; though subsequently in the cafe in his last interview with Sheridine, he chose to call him "invaluable."

The vessel he was intending to follow to sea was not a United States packet but a Spanish brig, which was expected to sail at the same time; but Fordwell still chose to deceive Sheridine as to the real character of his vessel. Instead of pursuing the packet-ship after getting outside, he gave chase to the Spaniard, captured her, and sent her to the Gulf. After a long cruise he returned to New York for the purpose of refitting his vessel, when he fell in with the drifting pirogue.

We have now shown that Fordwell, though an "adventurer" in one sense of the word, was an honorable man; and that he only had termed his vessel a pirate in order to ascertain the effect upon Sheridine when he first brought him on board, and had subsequently continued the deception for his own amusement since he saw that he was believed. He was, nevertheless, a man of honor, high-spirited, brave and humane; and although he liked Sheridine while he was in his vessel, for his wit and social qualities, in which he excelled when he chose, he despised him for a certain heartlessness of character which he was not long in discovering in him.

After his interview with Sheridine in the cafe he hastened to return to the schooner. As soon as he entered the cabin, Clara saw by his countenance that he had some important intelligence to communicate. She threw aside a book she was reading and sprang forward to meet him.

"I have seen him! I told you he did not drown!" he exclaimed, as he took her hand.

"Who? my brother?" she cried, between hope and fear.

"Yes. I have had two hours' interview with him this morning."

"Where?"

"In the city, at the cafe."

"I know not whether to be glad or grieved. To tell you truly I feel a load is removed from my heart to know he did not drown."

"I don't wonder. But he lives to be judged!"

"He is a terrible man. I should think you would be afraid to be near him."

The Captain smiled.

"Fear is a composition that seldom enters my soul. I have been in many perilous places at times. That rug under your feet came from a Polar bear. I was up in the Arctic regions, and cast away among the Esquimaux. With two companions and some dogs we went out to look for game. Suddenly two monstrous white bears attacked us. We were only armed with spears, but we killed both monsters, though not without some hurts ourselves. See, Clara, where I sent the death-blow home here, and ask me if I fear one man, and he a coward."

"Did—Edwin speak of me?"

"Yes. He first said he wished me to serve him. I met him on the Battery, where he was engaged in making inquiries after the pirogue; for he has been very anxious to learn your fate. We walked to a cafe together where he related to me both of his attacks and their results; and in

doing so evinced a hardihood of villainy that amazed me. Well he spoke of you, but not as his sister, nor did he tell the truth after alluding to you."

"Who did he call me?"

"The daughter of a gentleman in the neighborhood. He said she attempted to stop him, that she, that is you, fired at him, and knocked off his mask when, finding he was recognized, he offered to let you depart in safety, provided that you would promise never to divulge what you knew. That you refused, and that not wishing to kill you he let you depart."

"Let me depart?"

"Such was his story. He said that he reached his boat, where he found Spurry and that they launched together into the stream. Spurry, he said, was bleeding profusely from his wound, when fearing that he would die, he landed to get aid; and when he returned, he could find neither the boat nor Spurry. He searched the shore for a long distance and finally concluded that he had gone down the river. He, however, carefully added that he suspected he must have been drowned, if so, by being run into by some vessel."

"This, then, is my brother's story?" exclaimed Clara, with amazement.

"Yes. In this way he would account for Spurry's absence and your own!"

"I shall fear ever to meet him again!"

"Yet once more I wish you to. You must know that your brother after finishing his account of the event, was so candid as to tell me that he still meditated his former designs upon Miss Leffingwell, and paid me the compliment to ask me to aid him!"

"But he supposed you were what you have so carefully led him to believe. If he knew you he would never have dared to propose such a thing to you!"

"I have given him full license to think of me as he does, especially by giving him Spurry; but this was probably to get rid of that man, and in part to be freed from Sheridine's importunities. But I had not the least conception of the enormous crimes he contemplated. He has now proposed to me to assist him in his present purpose. He has asked me to go up in my vessel as far as Monmouth, and let him have twelve men to surprise General Leffingwell's house and capture his daughter."

"And what answer did you make him?"

"That I would consent to do it?"

"Consented!" repeated Clara, her eyes flashing.

"Do not be angry, fair Clara," said Fordwell smiling.

"I consented for the purpose of defeating his very intentions."

"In what way?"

"That I have hardly yet resolved upon: but it is my purpose to bring him to punishment for his crimes. I have professed to aid him in order to entrap him. To-night I am to ascend the river with him on board."

"Yes. Do not start. You are not to see him nor he you. He comes aboard at sunset. Once aboard is in my power."

"Will he come?"

"There is no question of it."

"Will he not suspect you?"

"He cannot. He will be sure to meet the appointment. He is now certain of effecting his object. He has rooms already prepared for his victim, and is impatient of delay. To carry out my aim I consented to serve him."

"But on condition he aided me in plundering General Leffingwell's house. Do not look so wild! I have no intention of doing any such thing. I did but tempt the man. I only wished to sustain, too, my assumed character with him as a buccanier."

"I hardly know how to look upon you, sir!"

"Look upon me as one who loves you, and would die to make you happy," he said, with warmth. "The result of all I have in mind in this affair of your brother's, will prove to you, dear Clara, what I am."

CHAPTER XIV.

LAYING THE TRAP.

ABOUT an hour before sun-set, the Flying Cloud left her moorings, and stood up the Hudson past the Battery, and sailing leisurely along with a light south wind, at length came abreast of Canal street and dropped anchor. Clara had stood upon deck by Fordwell's side, while the schooner sailed along past the crowded piers, gazing with interest upon the scene around her. Her heart throbbed with emotions of delight as she felt that each moment she was advancing nearer and nearer her home. She had now been several days on board the schooner which had afforded her safety and an asylum. Although she would gladly have left the vessel the very next morning, and hasten back to Laurel Park and relieve the anxiety of her father and Frank, yet she yielded to the reasons advanced by Fordwell why she should for the present remain concealed, as this would be the only way of finally arresting her brother if he should have escaped drowning; for, he argued, if he should learn that she lived, he would doubtless fly the country to escape the punishment due to his deeds.

This delay had given Love, who never loses his opportunity, full field for his achievements, and the lovely girl had blushing confessed her interest in the gallant young officer who had preserved her life, and subsequently conducted towards her with such delicate consideration. Fordwell, as he talked with her, and gazed upon her, felt that he had, indeed, secured a treasure from the sea richer than all its buried wealth of gold and precious stones.

"I fear he will not come," said Clara, as the sun began to descend towards the horizon.

"He will not fail, for he cannot suspect me," answered Fordwell.

"There comes a boat this way," cried Clara.

"Then you had best go below! He must not see you, dear Clara."

The boat approached, and as it came near Fordwell saw that it was a shore boat, and that it contained the servant of the Mexican Consul.

He came on board and handed him a letter. He read as follows:—

"SEÑOR CAPITEN,

I am desirous of seeing you on some very important business. Will you at once leave your vessel and come to the Consulate.

Yours, &c.,

MANUEL GARCIA."

"This is a disappointment. I hardly know whether to comply or not. If I do, I fear I shall lose my chance of bringing Sheridine to justice. I will, however, go and see the Consul. I will leave a note for Sheridine if he comes on board!"

He then went into his cabin and handed the note from the Consul.

"I must go and see what this is he wishes to speak with me about. Your brother will come on board and I will leave a note for him. Be cautious to keep yourself from his sight."

"A boat is coming along side, sir," reported the officer of the deck.

"It is Edgar," exclaimed Clara, her heart in her mouth.

"I will go and see. If it is I will make some excuse and detain him, or take him to the Consul's with me."

Fordwell went on deck and saw Sheridine close along side. He accosted him in a pleasant tone and gave him his hand as he ascended to the deck.

"You are punctual."

"Yes. I never miss engagements where revenge is to be carried out."

"I am sorry to say that I can't go up just now, having to see the Spanish Consul on shore. If you will remain on board, perhaps when I come back I will get underweigh at once; though it may not be before morning."

"Well, I will tell you what I will do," answered Sheri-

dine. "I have just received a letter from my father informing me that my sister has been missing for some days, and he is inconsolable. I am amazed at the intelligence, and between us, I suspect that Winder.

"I will go up to-night by land, as there will be a bright moon, and it is but a three hours drive. My presence there will prevent any suspicions about me, and at the same time enable me to spy the ground and see best how and when to carry out our plans. You come up in the schooner as soon as you can get under weigh, and I will be on the watch for you."

Fordwell watched the face of the speaker closely. He began to believe his intentions were suspected, and that Sheridine wished to evade him; but when he reflected that if he had suspected him he would not have come on board and thus placed his person in his power, he banished the idea. Sheridine's manner, too, was entirely confidential and earnest.

"I don't know when I shall be able to go up," answered Fordwell; "but if you will accompany me to the Consul's I will let you know at once. If there is any delay why you can go up home and wait for my arrival. But you must pledge yourself to treat Mr. Winder and Miss Leffingwell with every courtesy. You must not think of harming them. If you go up you must go as a friend, at least, outwardly."

"That I will do. I will so play the friend that they will never suspect I did other than love them both always."

"Come with me in the boat first to the Consul's."

The Consul proved to have business which would detain Fordwell for several days. It related to evidence to be given in court respecting the purchase of a brig for the Mexican service which had been built in New York, but which the Consul refused to pay for, pleading a failure in the builders to comply fully with their contract. Fordwell, seeing that this would detain him perhaps a week, made no objections to Sheridine's departure.

He found much difficulty in prevailing upon Clara to remain in the schooner so long, but finally after he had unfolded to her his plan of action with reference to her brother, she consented. And while the whole country was ringing with her unaccountable disappearance, she was quietly dwelling on board, passing her time, when Fordwell was away, in drawing, and music. This voluntary imprisonment she endured from the same great principles which had governed her when she refused to direct her boat towards her drowning brother. She felt that by this she would bring about more effectually his punishment. She was conscious that her remaining on board would not have been defended by the rigid laws of society; but the same cause which rendered it expedient for her to stay one hour after she was saved from the drifting boat, were still a forcible operation; besides Fordwell was now her betrothed lover, and she knew that the day was not far distant when she should be his honored bride.

Sheridine, therefore, took his departure the same night from the city for Laurel Hill. We have there seen how he conducted during his week's stay. We have spoken of his zeal in searching for his sister whom he now believed had been drowned in the boat, which idea gave him joy, for he felt that with her had perished the last evidence of his crimes. We have seen his courtesy towards Charles Winder, and the general kindness of his manner. He had not the face however, for some days, to present himself before Miss Leffingwell: but finally he availed himself of the visit of Charles to accompany him, and thus by virtue of his presence challenge that civility which he feared he should not receive alone. Besides, he feared to have an interview with her alone, when nothing, would divide her attention from him for he feared she might read his guilt in his embarrassed manner and conscious looks.

His object in visiting her was partly to take a more particular survey of the premises preparatory to the attack upon the house, and partly to indulge his triumph in the anticipation of soon possessing and humbling her.

We have seen the result of his interview and the hurried

manner in which he left the house and galloped away. We will follow him. After he had ridden about a mile he turned aside to a bluff which commanded a view of the river, and looked earnestly off upon the water for the expected schooner. Daily twenty times a day, he had gone to the river side for the same purpose.

Now, to this great joy, he beheld her not half a mile below, slowly standing up the river. There was no mistaking her. It was the Flying Cloud; for she was under her large ample fore-topsail, square enough for a frigate's, which floated above her slender deck like a white cloud borne onward on the bosom of the wind. His delight was boundless. He shouted with enthusiasm, and spurring his horse down the steep path, dashed along the sandy beach towards it.

"There is your brother, Clara," said Fordwell, as he looked at the horseman through his glass. "You see your apprehensions that he would escape us, are without foundation. No, his revenge is too deep—his soul too wicked, to give up the crime he contemplates."

"I am glad the hour of his judgment has come," exclaimed Clara in a tone of thrilling earnestness. "But I fear lest he may have done mischief to those we would protect, since we have been delayed."

"He bound himself to be friendly to both. But we shall soon know. I will leave the schooner to, and send my boat for him."

In ten minutes Sheridine was on board, and his evil pleasure at the arrival of the schooner sparkled in his eyes.

"I feared you would forget me, Captain. I was becoming impatient."

"Is all ready for action?"

"Yes. There is no difficulty in getting both into our hands. There are but four men-servants at the general's, and at my father's but five, including the farm-men. With a dozen of your fellows, well armed, we can effect our object with ease. I shall hardly know how to express my gratitude to you, my dear Fordwell, when I get them both safely on board. But it is early. It can't be past two o'clock. I can scarcely wait until to-night."

"Well, we shall have time for the preliminaries! I want myself, to go on shore and take a view of the premises in the day time. You will be so kind as to lend me your horse, which I see fastened on the shore and remain here on board until I return!"

"I am willing. You have good wine, I dare say, and some from Havana."

"Yes. My steward will let you have what you wish. I will go down into the cabin and speak in your behalf."

"You are very kind, my dear Captain."

"Not a bit, I assure you. It gives me pleasure to entertain you on board."

With these words Fordwell went below, and passing through the sumptuous main cabin, tapped at the door which opened into that occupied by Clara. She admitted him, when he cried in a low tone,

"He is on deck. He suspects nothing. He is impatient for the hour of action to come. I am going on shore, and intend to ride to General Leffingwell and then to your father's. I shall make known to them and Mr. Winder all that has passed."

"I shall unfold to them the whole history of your brother's crimes. I shall make known to them his intentions with reference to Miss Leffingwell and Charles Winder. I shall also assure them of your safety. I shall then invite them on board to be here at five o'clock."

"And the clergyman?" archly asked Clara, with a blushing smile.

"Yes, by all means. We can't get along without one. I shall not forget to include one by any means. He is to be the crowner of our happiness. Now lock yourself in and let not your brother suspect your presence. I shall ride fast and return within two hours. Steward," he said, addressing his servant, "serve Mr. Sheridine with wine and cigars when he calls upon you. Send my first officer here. Mr. Garvel, I wish you to be attentive to the gentleman on

deck, but do not suffer him to leave the schooner. In a word, he is to be held as a prisoner, but without suspecting it."

"I understand you, sir."

"Now, Mr. Sheridine," said Fordwell on deck, "if you will try to make yourself at home, I will soon be back when I trust I shall play the host so well, you will quite overlook my present neglect."

CHAPTER XV.

JUDGMENT.

In a few minutes more Fordwell was in the saddle so lately vacated by Sheridine, and having gained the turn-pike, took the direction first to Monmouth; the way to which had been clearly explained by Clara. When he arrived there he introduced himself to General Leffingwell and his daughter, and then gave them in detail the history of what is already known to the reader touching the crimes of Edgar Sheridine. To express their astonishment, words would fail in meaning.

They accepted his invitation to meet him on board his schooner, and he then hastened to hold a similar interview with Dr. Sheridine.

Here to him, in the presence of Mr. Winder and Frank, he a second time narrated the history of the guilty son. At first the father was confounded and could not give it his belief. But when Fordwell informed him that his son was on board his schooner, that Clara was also there, and when he invited them to go on board at five o'clock, he was fain to give credence to his account, painful and extraordinary as it was.

At length Fordwell regained his vessel, when he found Sheridine in fine spirits.

"I have seen your father and Mr. Winder," said Fordwell after taking a seat in the cabin with him, and at the same time with a careless air taking a pair of loaded pistols from a case and laying them upon the table by his side.

"They did not know or suspect anything?"

"Oh, no! I was a stranger you know, merely inquiring the way."

"Oh, yes. I see!"

"I saw the General and his daughter, also!"

"The deuce you did! Lost the way there, eh!"

"She is very beautiful!" answered Fordwell, placing the pistols in a belt and buckling it round his waist.

"You look as if you were going to board an enemy, Captain."

"No. I expect some visitors soon. I am only making my toilet to receive them!"

With these words he went on deck and closed the cabin doors after him. In a few minutes he saw both parties of visitors approach the landing nearly at the same time. He ordered his cutter to go and bring them on board.

They were received by him on deck with courtesy, and after desiring them to excuse him a moment, he went below again.

"My visitors have come, Mr. Sheridine!"

"Who are they?"

"I shall invite them down to see you! But first let me suffer your toilet to be made for their reception. Bring those irons, Mr. Garvel."

The officer, armed with a cutlass, advanced, followed by two men bearing manacles and fetters.

"Put them on him!"

"Why, wh—what—what means this?" exclaimed Sheridine, turning pale as the men approached him. "This is a joke! What the deuce—but you carry it too far!"

"Seize him and iron! If he resists, cut him down!" cried Fordwell, sternly.

In less than two minutes, the guilty man was ironed hand and foot, and the chain, passed round a pillar that supported the gilded roof of the cabin.

"Mr. Fordwell, pray tell me,—what do you mean by this?" he gasped, and turned pale between rage and fear.

"Your visitors will be down. Be ready to receive them."

With these words Fordwell called at the companionway to General Leffingwell, who came down, followed by Dr. Sheridine and Frank. Charles Winder assisted Rosa down, and the whole group stood gazing upon the criminal with mingled and various emotions of horror, surprise, pity, contempt and abhorrence. The looks of fierce amazement and horror upon Sheridine's face as he saw them one after another enter the cabin were terrible. He started back with deep curses upon Fordwell, and ground his teeth. They stood gazing upon him in silence, overcome with their emotions. His presence confirmed to them the story of Fordwell.

The latter now began to repeat before him, to them, his crimes, all of which he denied with fearful oaths.

"Bring me one living that dare say I killed Spurry—that I was one of the masked men," he cried fiercely and triumphantly. "No one can prove it."

"Here is our evidence," answered Fordwell, calmly, as he threw open the state room door which had hitherto hidden Clara from the eyes of all.

Upon beholding her, Sheridine stood like a man suddenly paralyzed. His eyes, rigid in their sockets, glared upon her as if she had been a ghost from the dead. The next moment he threw himself forward to the length of his chain, snatched the cutlass from the hand of Garvel, and attempted to penetrate his bosom with the point. Fordwell took it from him and bade them hold him.

Dr. Sheridine, Frank, Rosa, the General, and even Winder, one after the other embraced the restored Clara with tears of joy.

"Now, Sheridine," said Fordwell, "you have yet to receive your severest punishment. Will the Rev. Mr. Garvel prepare to perform the ceremony for which he was invited here. Clara are you ready? Dr. Sheridine, as your daughter has consented to become my bride, I trust you will not, under the circumstances, withhold now the consent which you gave me at your house to-day."

The ceremony was performed, and Fordwell and Clara were congratulated by all as bridegroom and bride.

"Now, Mr. Winder and Mrs. Leffingwell, I trust you are prepared to fulfil the pledge severally made to me to-day that if one consented the other would not refuse. My heart is set on your marriage now, while Mr. Edgar Sheridine is here an invited guest."

The priest performed the marriage rites also for Charles and Rosa. Sheridine looked on with the ferocious aspect of a chained tiger. When the ceremony was finished, they all repaired to the deck, and Dr. Sheridine having refused to make any intercourse with his son, he was delivered into the charge of two police officers whom Fordwell had brought up from the city with him. They took him into the schooner's boat, which was pulled by six men, and in this manner he was conveyed to the city, where, (we may as well say here) he was tried and executed for the murder of George, the footman. Fordwell was now invited to a bridal supper at Monmouth, which invitation he and his bride accepted; and although there was cast a shadow of gloom over the festal occasion, yet there seemed to be prevalent in every mind a resolve that the crimes of Edgar Sheridine should not mar the happiness of the hour.

THE END.

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653 Lasso King's League; or, Buck Taylor in Texas.
649 Buffalo Bill's Chief of Cowboys; or, Buck Taylor.
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